New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1950

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**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of November 27, 1950*

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NEW YORK POST HOME NEWS
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES

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"The Tower Beyond Tragedy"

The New York Times

November 27, 1950

Judith Anderson Opens ANTA's Series in Jeffers' 'Tower Beyond Tragedy'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

In all conscience, no one should ever ask to see tragedy acted more magnificently than Judith Anderson plays it in "The Tower Beyond Tragedy." This is the Robinson Jeffers poem on the Electra theme with which ANTA opened its series at the ANTA Playhouse last evening. Call it a masterpiece and you cannot be wrong.

For the Jeffers poem is written in lines of fire that make an ancient theme seem immediate and devastating. You hardly notice the art, the meaning is so close and overwhelming. No one has quite recovered from Miss Anderson's performance in Jeffers' "Medea" three seasons ago.

* * *

But her Clytemnestra overshadows it. Perhaps the part is more congenial, since it is more human and varied. However that may be, her acting has a passion and also a grandeur that make it unforgettable. It is womanly, but it is also savage and horrible. Although Miss Anderson is a small woman, she has incomparable authority on the stage, speaking the lines with terrible ferocity and marching to a tragic doom like a woman possessed.

Greek tragedy can be mighty stately if the acting is not tipped with genius. But that is the armor with which Miss Anderson has gone into battle as the murderess of Agamemnon and the lover of Aegisthus. The acting is sculpturally beautiful. Miss Anderson has not forgotten the physical portraiture—nor will anyone who sees her in the part, incidentally. But the qualities that make her acting memorable come from the flaming spirit of a great actress who has dreamed of magnificence and knows how to reach it.

* * *

Altogether, this is an inspired production. Although Mr. Jeffers has taken his theme out of Aeschylus, he is a modern poet who thinks in terms of human beings. He has concentrated the horrors of Agamemnon's tribe in a compact, tingling and shocking tragedy that moves swiftly down the bloody corridors of time. The poetry is never self-conscious. Like Miss Anderson, Mr. Jeffers has squandered all his passion on the people and the events without academic genuflections to tradition.

In the direction, Robert Ross has met him on equal terms. Wolfgang Roth's simple set of a palace entrance, flooded with baleful and dramatic light by Feder, and Castillo's terse costumes give the production a meaningful appearance. The chorus, handled in terms of music and procession, goes beyond tradition into the pure essence of drama, and must be recognized as a contribution to the staging of Greek tragedy.

All the actors share in the general inspiration. Marian Seldes' Electra and Alfred Ryder's Orestes come out of complete awareness of the terrors of the theme and keep the tragedy ominous and breathless after Clytemnestra has left it. Thelma Schnee's Cassandra is unforgettably harrowed and horror-ridden. Philip Huston's tall, self-confident Aegisthus and Frederic Tozere's brazen Agamemnon are sharply etched in terms of acting. Robert Harrison opens the play with a venerable though forceful portrait of Aeschylus.

* * *

To this playgoer's way of thinking, the device of bringing back Agamemnon's voice from the dead through a voice amplifier (if that is what it is) strikes the only false note in a evening of genuine splendors. For "The Tower Beyond Tragedy" is genuine poetry and drama without artifice or mannerism. And Miss Anderson's acting crowns a distinguished career with a great tragic performance. No one should ever expect anything finer in the theatre.

"THE TOWER BEYOND TRAGEDY"

Play by Robinson Jeffers, based on the author's poem of the same name; staged by Robert Ross; settings by Wolfgang Roth; costumes by Castillo; presented by Luther Greene for the American National Theatre and Academy at the ANTA Playhouse, November 26, 1950. The cast:

Aeschylus	Robert Harrison
Agamemnon	Frederic Tozere
Clytemnestra	Judith Anderson
Leucippe	Ludie Claire
Corinna	Martha Downs
Cassandra	Thelma Schnee
King's Guard	Victor Thorley
Townswoman	Ruth Manning
Townsman	David Elliott
Captain	John Straub
Porter	Don McHenry
Queen's Guard	Eric Fleming
Aegisthus	Philip Huston
Electra	Marian Seldes
Aegisthus' Attendant	Michael Thorne
Orestes	Alfred Ryder

Synopsis: Scene in front of the ancient palace at Mycenae. Time: 1500 B. C.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

November 27, 1950

Poem-Based Play Powerful Theater

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Type—Greek tragedy.
Topic—Vengeful crimes.
Treatment—Modern, poetic.
Star—Tumultuous.
I find it—Unique theater.

Our most exciting actress and most distinguished theater poet joined their skills for a second time to open the American National Theater Academy's subscription series last night. Judith Anderson is starred in Robinson Jeffers' "The Tower Beyond Tragedy," a poem about Clytemnestra and Electra.

This is the writer and interpreter who made theatrical history a couple of seasons ago with "Medea."

Mr. Jeffers wrote his poem 25 years ago. In its original form there was no intention that it be presented in the theater. Certain changes, mostly cuts in exposition, have been made for the stage. In 1941 Miss Anderson appeared in the play at an open-air theater in California.

Three Great Crises.

The poem centers on the three great crises in this age-old story. In the first act, Agamemnon the King returns to Mycenae after 12 years of war. Clytemnestra, his wife, has hated him for sacrificing their daughter to a goddess for his wanton crimes. Now she has a lover, Aegisthus, whom she wants to make King.

Clytemnestra kills her husband, and the first act shows her holding off the crowds until her lover arrives, by offering herself at auction to the soldiers. She would kill her children too, but they are taken to the mountains.

Cassandra, a prisoner brought by Agamemnon, can see the future, and terrifies the Queen.

In the first scene of the second act, the children, Electra and Orestes, return. Despite her pleas, the boy kills his mother as his sister urges him to avenge their father.

Work of Stature.

Electra recognizes a passion for incest, grown from the royal belief that no other blood is good enough for the line of kings. Orestes is tempted but turns from her into a realm where the greater order of nature prevails over little human inward desires.

Miss Anderson is unquestionably in a class all her own when it comes to dealing with huge, theatrical passions. Here she jolts you, disgusts you and terrifies you, as the situation warrants. There are moments of lightning-like magic in her performance, as in her reaction to the soldier who throws a spear at her, and again in her terrorized pleading with Orestes to spare her life.

Rush of Ideas.

There are also moments when the sheer bulk of the lines make the actors seem to rush from idea to idea faster than the audience ear can follow. But the flashes lift Miss Anderson's performance beyond comparison with any other actress we know.

Production details can be quarreled with when they detract from the simple human values and the poetic conception of the story telling. The main point remains, however, that the ANTA Series receives a start of distinction.

New York Post
HOME NEWS
November 28, 1950

Judith Anderson's Clytemnestra

By Richard Watts Jr.

Judith Anderson is the most overwhelming of our tragic actresses, and she brings to the classic roles a quality of raw, elemental power virtually unheard of in our restrained modern theatre. At her best, she can almost literally lift you out of your seat and set your hair to standing on end. I didn't think she was quite at her best Sunday night in Robinson Jeffers' "The Tower Beyond Tragedy," but it is only by the standard she herself has established that her performance in Mr. Jeffers' dramatized poem must inevitably be judged, and it seems to me that she doesn't provide the emotional bombshell she offered in "Medea."

It is this absence of overpowering emotional force that is the surprising feature of "The Tower Beyond Tragedy." Mr. Jeffers has turned his long poem of some twenty-five years ago into more or less of a play, and there is no denying its dignity, stateliness and intelligence. It is clearly the work of a poet with fine rhetorical gifts, but it is not the work of a genuinely effective dramatist. Where Mr. Jeffers showed in his version of "Medea" that he knew admirably how to harness his verse to the needs of the theatre, "The Tower Beyond Tragedy" indicates that the author is still uncomfortable in the theatrical medium.

A Few Murders

Save for Miss Anderson's fireworks, it is, in fact, a curiously placid tragedy, and that is all the more remarkable when you consider its dramatic materials. For Mr. Jeffers is telling the tumultuous story of how Clytemnestra murdered her husband, Agamemnon, when he came back from the Trojan War bringing the gloomy prophetess, Cassandra, with him, and how the murderess and her lover were, in turn, slaughtered by her own children, Orestes and Electra, a brother and sister somewhat addicted to incestuous love. With Miss Anderson to act such a gory tale, it should be something tremendous, but Sunday night it seemed just dignified.

Gratitude

For all its high poetic earnestness, the verse of "The Tower Beyond Tragedy" appears lacking in power and passion. Furthermore, it is almost always presented in narrative and descriptive, rather than in dramatic, terms. It is poetry to be recited, instead of drama to be acted, and that is not the right thing for a verse drama, especially when the verse is inclined to sound academic. There are only a few times when Mr. Jeffers' play flames into impressive theatrical life, after which it inevitably falls back into its interesting but somewhat unexciting rhetoric again.

It seems ungrateful in the characteristic fashion of a critic to speak so coldly about the first production of the ambitious season the American National Theatre and Academy is planning at its own playhouse. We should all be very happy to have a chance to see Miss Anderson again in a tragic role, to encourage so distinguished a poet as Mr. Jeffers to continue writing for the drama, and to enrich our spirit by watching an important American writer in his contemplation of the classic stories of the mighty Greeks. For all of these opportunities, I am properly thankful. But I can't say that I was deeply moved.

Although Miss Anderson's Clytemnestra is not as exciting as her Medea, and she was occasionally a bit inaudible, she once more indicates what a superb actress she can be. Marian Seldes is visually an impressive Electra. Alfred Ryder has some effective moments as Orestes. I thought Robert Harrison was excellent in his few moments as the playwright Aeschylus, and I wish I could have heard more of Thelma Schnee's speeches as Cassandra.

"The Tower Beyond Tragedy" is certainly worth the attention of an experimental theatre, but it is less than completely satisfying as tragic drama.

DAILY NEWS
November 27, 1950

Judith Anderson Has Heroic Role In ANTA's 'Tower Beyond Tragedy'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

In its new home, the ANTA Playhouse, the American National Theatre and Academy presented last evening an impressive and beautifully-spoken production of Robinson Jeffers' poetic examination of Greek mythology, "The Tower Beyond Tragedy." Once again Judith Anderson strode upon the stage, spitting and snarling and dying magnificently, and once again the First Dramatist, Aeschylus, got a taut and skillful treatment at the hands of the poet Jeffers.

Those who saw Miss Anderson in the title role of "Medea" will want to see her again as Clytemnestra, the queen who stabs her king, Agamemnon, when he comes home to wash up after a war. They will find her in the same rare form, speaking words of fate like the true tragedienne she is. This time Miss Anderson's admirers will find that there are others upon the stage besides herself — Thelma Schnee, for instance, who does an effective job as the doom-predicting Cassandra, and Marian Seldes as that fine and forceful daughter of vengeance, Electra.

"The Tower Beyond Tragedy" is the first of ten projected new productions to which supporters of ANTA have subscribed. ANTA, whose non-profit purpose is to further the gospel of the theatre, has made its facilities and enthusiasm available for production of plays which might be hopelessly risky on a commercial stage. If any of these ventures should achieve popularity, a commercial run could follow, and naturally everybody hopes that "The Tower Beyond Tragedy" will survive its limited ANTA engagement and go on for a Broadway run somewhere.

Picturesque Death Scene.

Much as I am impressed by "The Tower," I hesitate to urge a venture into the marts of show business. "Medea" was a circus piece —a bravura performance by an extraordinarily vigorous actress. This other Jeffers work has some stunning scenes, but it lacks the great extravagance of tragedy which made "Medea" a popular number. Clytemnestra stabs Agamemnon, and later her son, Orestes, stabs her—and Miss Anderson dies as realistically and picturesquely as did Jose Ferrer in the stage production of "Cyrano," or as did Tallulah Bankhead in "The Eagle Has Two Heads." Rich, red blood trickles down the marble steps of Wolfgang Roth's beautiful and simple setting as Miss Anderson expires, feet upward. But this is an incident in and not the ending of the drama, and what follows is anticlimactic, though ever so well played.

The ANTA Playhouse, newly acquired and yet to be paid for by public subscription, is the old Guild Theatre on 52d St.—still a splendid and impressive place. In it, Greek tragedy seems at home, and in it Mr. Jeffers' lines sound strong and true. People who have affection for the theatre can show honest gratitude toward the many unselfish workers who have made the Playhouse possible and who have given it so admirable a beginning.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune
November 27, 1950

By HOWARD BARNES

ANTA's New Venture

THE American National Theater and Academy has launched its season on West Fifty-second Street with a stylized and occasionally compelling production of Robinson Jeffers's poetic drama, "The Tower Beyond Tragedy." The chief distinction of the work is a fiercely eloquent portrayal of Clytemnestra by Judith Anderson. The great actress moves through the poet-dramatist's new version of Aeschylus with power and meaning, despite static scenes and lengthy monologues. At the ANTA, formerly the Guild Theater, she brings vitality and dramatic dimensions to what might easily have been merely a reading of the original Jeffers poem. Much of the offering is just that.

* * *

The free verse of "The Tower Beyond Tragedy" invites a declamatory treatment and it receives it from most members of the company in this first play of a subscription series. Although murder, matricide, adultery and incest motivate what little action there is, they do not assume heroically tragic proportions unless Miss Anderson is dominating the tableaux. She alone burns bright as the old tigress who kills Agamemnon, defies the people of Mycenae and is slain by her son, Orestes, with Electra acting as an incestuous accessory. Since the poetry rarely soars, it inspires very little emotional response, unless it is backed up by superlative acting. ANTA and Jeffers are fortunate in having Miss Anderson for their star.

* * *

The author's dramatization of his poem has a prologue delivered by Aeschylus and then relates the murder of the king by his faithless wife, Agamemnon's dire threats after his spirit has entered Cassandra's body and the bloody retribution of Clytemnestra's children eight years later. Robert Ross has staged it in postured groupings against a setting of palace steps designed by Wolfgang Roth. The movement of the tragedy, except for the fluent and sulphurous performance of Miss Anderson, might have been designated by a metronome. The crowds of townspeople and soldiers chant from time to time, but this does not add to the terror and force of an ancient theme, which has been re-worked before to far better advantage.

* * *

Much as one may wish great success to the bold venture of ANTA, its initial step is not very sturdy. There is almost no crescendo to the work as it switches abruptly from matricide to incest. There is no acting to match that of the star. Frederic Tozere swaggers briefly as Agamemnon, Philip Huston wears a helmet handsomely as Aegisthus, Marian Seldes is a taut Electra, and Alfred Ryder acts like a somnambulist as Orestes, which may very well be what he intended to do. Then there are Thelma Schnee, who is hard to hear as the unhappy prophetess of doom, Cassandra, and Robert Harrison dressed up in a long beard for the part of Aeschylus. "The Tower Beyond Tragedy" has fitful moments of depth and intensity when Miss Anderson is on stage, but it is dramatically wanting.

Journal American
November 27, 1950

Thousands of Attractive Words About Very Little

By JOHN McCLAIN

In my early academic youth my mother, who was a successful classical student and the valedictorian of her graduating class in college, made every effort to impress me with the value of a similar education.

She used to tell me that one would never have a proper appreciation of the words we speak without a knowledge of their Latin or Greek derivation.

It took quite a long while but last night, at the ANTA Playhouse, where Judith Anderson appeared for the first time in something called "The Tower Beyond Tragedy," I began to see her point.

This is a dramatization of a poem by Robinson Jeffers, and with my limited classical background, I found it next to impossible to determine who was doing it to who, or why.

The language was soaring and the performances were uniformly sympathetic and forceful. I thought Miss Anderson was wonderful in her enunciation and motion, and you could not find a better couple than Marian Seldes and Alfred Ryder to occupy center stage for an entire scene, talking with great eloquence about their plight and getting almost nowhere.

Even those of us who have been exposed to Greek mythology in limited degrees will recall that a King called Agamemnon came home from the wars and had the misfortune to discover that his wife was being unfaithful to him. This was a mistake, because it cost him his life at her hands.

His daughter, Electra, who was his greatest fan, got her brother steamed up to the point where he stepped up and put the knife into the Old Lady, Clytemnestra. There you have the plot.

It takes Mr. Jeffers several thousand attractive words to unwind all this through two acts and three scenes. I can't think of anyone more capable of reading all these words, especially Miss Anderson as Clytemnestra, than the people who are handling them at the ANTA Playhouse, **but again I may not be sufficiently steeped in culture to be held and moved as I should.**

Viewing the proceedings through the eyes of a guy who had just drifted in from the street, without any of the aforementioned classical background, one would be obliged to say that it's a great deal of talk about very little.

Daily Mirror
November 27, 1950

Judith Anderson Gives Telling Performance

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Though she learned of her mother's death on the Coast only a short while before curtain time, Judith Anderson, true to the tradition that the show must go on, gave a powerful, bravura performance in Robinson Jeffers' "The Tower Beyond Tragedy," at the ANTA Playhouse last evening.

"Tower Beyond Tragedy" is based on Aeschylus' "Orestes" trilogy. However, Jeffers has made a number of changes in the legend, as dramatized in its many facets by Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripedes. Agamemnon, upon his return from Troy, is murdered by his wife, Clytemnestra, because of her love for Aegisthus and resentment over the sacrifice of her daughter, Iphigenia.

Agamemnon's remaining children, Electra and Orestes, flee the palace for safety. They return later, and Orestes, goaded by Electra, kills Aegisthus and Clytemnestra. Electra then hangs herself, and Orestes is pursued by the Furies, who are heard but not seen.

Miss Anderson played Clytemnestra with telling effect, with more nuances than she did "Medea" a few seasons ago, despite her personal misfortune. Robert Harrison, cast as Aeschylus, read a brief explanation of the events to come, with resonant voice and admirable diction. Thelma Schnee, as the prophetic Cassandra, who, in the current version, ultimately stabs herself; Frederic Tozere, as Agamemnon; Philip Huston, as Aegisthus; Marian Seldes, as Electra; and Alfred Ryder, as Orestes, give all to the script demanded by the author and director Robert Ross.

There are rather gaudy settings by Wolfgang Roth and costumes by Castillo.

"The Tower Beyond Tragedy," though by a distinguished poet, somehow failed to impress, stimulate and move us as much as it might have, last evening. First of a series of 10 productions to be presented by ANTA, it is scheduled to run four weeks. We think it will have a limited appeal.

"The Golden State"

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

November 27, 1950

'Golden State' Owes Its Humor To Josephine

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Type—Comedy drama.
Topic—Confirmed dreamers.
Star—In class of her own.
Script—Mighty mild.
For me—Star is Hull thing.

Although "The Golden State" is billed as a new comedy, it is more properly a comedy-drama. The idea or philosophy it illustrates is quite serious. The treatment is funny almost entirely through the agency of Josephine Hull.

Mrs. Hull here plays the part of an unearthly, good hearted rattle brain, whose childish behavior has so embarrased her daughter and son-in-law that they do not even permit her to see her grandchild. This aspect of the story is kept somewhat in the background, though it is perfectly clear throughout, that the lady's dearest wish is to come to good terms with the young people.

Gold Strike.

Meanwhile she takes in boarders and gets involved with an unconvincing discovery of alleged gold in her back yard. Disappointment in this strike leads all the characters to do what they have really wanted to all along, instead of clinging indefinitely to dreams of luck.

Because Mrs. Hull has for some time distinguished herself in nit-wit roles, audiences, and critics as well, have come to coo over her, as if she was a precious personality (which she is) but nothing much more substantial.

Do not for a moment be fooled. She is a fine actress and a comedienne of real distinction, whose effects are about as accidental as New Year's Eve.

Her motions have an endearing ineffectuality, like a very young baby.

Bastion of Logic.

Mrs. Hull can make a "yes" or a "no" delightful, and given a comic idea like, "Of course I've got credit—I owe everybody in town," she is a bastion of warm hearted illogic.

At one point, by simply looking at another character, she won such a laugh Saturday night that it spontaneously turned into applause. Yet for all the fine funny moments Mrs. Hull provides, and the way she touches you with a breath of loneliness, there was a feeling which I shared, that she had not been entirely done right by.

As the other temporary Californians waiting for a break, there is a pleasant, rather empty-handed cast. Ernest Truex brings color and personality to an unimaginatively designed prospector. Jocelyn Brando, Polly Rowles, John Randolph and Lou Polan are the run-of-the-mill married boarders at Mrs. Hull's suburban rancho.

"THE GOLDEN STATE"

Comedy by Samuel Spewack; staged by Mr. Spewack; settings by Lester Polakov; costumes by Grace Houston; presented by Bella Spewack at the Fulton Theatre, November 25, 1950. The cast:

Betty Williamson.....Jocelyn Brando
Mrs. Morenas...Josephine Hull
Sophie Kressner..Polly Rowles
Mr. Jansen....Frank Tweddell
A Young Man...Henry Beckman
Tim White.....Ernest Truex
Jesse Weir.....Ben Lackland
Joe Williamson..John Randolph
Bob Kressner.....Lou Polan
Hubert Clay.....John Hudson
Mr. Burns.....Robert Pike

Synopsis: Scene: The patio and living room of Mrs. Morenas' house in Los Angeles. The present. Act I. Late afternoon. Act II. Scene 1. Early evening next day. Scene 2. Several days later. Act III. Two days later.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

November 27, 1950

By HOWARD BARNES

Not Gold But Dross

WHEN Josephine Hull and Ernest Truex fail to keep a comedy from foundering, it is a sure bet that there is something exceedingly awry with the writing. That is certainly the case with Samuel Spewack's "The Golden State," a boring whim-wham which has opened at the Fulton. Proceeding on the assumption that even a dull jest, if repeated frequently enough, may get a chuckle, the author has imagined that a gold mine is discovered in the patio of a Los Angeles boarding-house. The notion leaves two of our most ingratiating players on a treadmill and an audience valiantly trying to smother yawns.

* * *

The vein of humor in "The Golden State" is no more extensive than the supposed strike which occurs when some bags of ore are inadvertently dumped into a back-yard excavation. Mrs. Hull, in her first starring role, has to rely on pantomime for the few moments of amusement she creates in the production. Neither the lines nor the incidents of the plot help her a whit, as she joins with her paying guests in what appears to be a bonanza only to land in the District Attorney's office. Truex has no better a time of it as a prospector who freezes like a bird dog when he approaches a lode. Rarely have two superior performers been given such feckless assignments.

* * *

Spewack has attempted to equip his comedy with satirical barbs, but they rarely hit the target, even when that is as big as Los Angeles. He has introduced an ex-convict, who immediately forms a company after a few nuggets have been found; a song-writer and his wife, and a couple who want a home and family and get it, despite the South California bubble's bursting. In "The Golden State" they are all singularly uninteresting characters, engaged in the dullest of doings.

* * *

It is hard to believe that Mrs. Hull and Truex together cannot start a momentum of merriment, but that is the embarrassing fact. Truex takes swigs from a whisky bottle in lieu of delivering funny lines, while the star is mostly involved in idle chatter about her husband, who has had the luck to go off to Madrid, horoscopes and a stuffy son-in-law. Jocelyn Brando, Frank Tweddell, Ben Lackland and Lou Polan are a few of Mrs. Hull's unfortunate colleagues, wandering around rather aimlessly under the author's direction. "The Golden State" is a comedy in name only.

DAILY NEWS

November 27, 1950

Josephine Hull in Fairly Funny Role

'The Golden State' Amusing in Spots

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Since it always is a pleasure to see Josephine Hull playing a lovable rattlebrain, and since it is amusing to see Ernest Truex as a hard-drinking prospector who freezes like a bird dog at the sight of gold ore, there is a certain amount of light entertainment to be had from attending Samuel Spewack's new comedy, "The Golden State." But the comedy, which had its first performance Saturday evening at the Fulton Theatre, must be described as slight and amiable, rather than funny and uproarious.

Mr. Spewack's small frolic centers itself in Mrs. Hull's modest, Spanish-type home in Southern California—and the setting by Lester Polakov is among the season's best, being attractive, atmospherically correct and workable. Mrs. Hull, forever the dreamer, lives on hopes and no money. Being of early California Spanish descent, she believes she is the rightful heir to all of Beverly Hills, a Los Angeles suburb which is chock-a-block with rich movie people. As soon as the courts get around to validating her claim she will be worth a pretty penny.

Proof Positive.

In the meantime, existence is precarious. Even with the renting out of various parts of her little place to couples and single roomers, she is short of money. When somebody informs her her credit is no good she denies the statement with a regal indignation that only Mrs. Hull could summon. "Of course my credit is good," she expostulates. "I owe everybody in town."

Mr. Truex has wandered in off the desert, lugging his bedroll and a couple of sacks of promising ore. When, by mischance, this ore is used to fill a hole in Mrs. Hull's back yard, Ernie thinks he has discovered another gold mine. One of the roomers happens to be Ben Lackland, a financial wizard on parole from San Quentin, and Ben enthusiastically undertakes to make everybody rich and happy by organizing a gold-mining company.

I'm of the opinion that Mr. Spewack has spread his comedy too thin—so thin that, in his role of director, he cannot get enough pace out of the performance to warrant one's paying close attention. And "The Golden State" does seem too local. Those who know Southern California and its nutty denizens may find real humor, as I did, in Mrs. Hull's complaint that Boulder Dam has changed the climate; but those who don't know Southern California are in a great and possibly happy majority and the joke will escape them.

Mrs. Hull, Mr. Truex and Mr. Lackland have some amiable fellow players, including Jocelyn Brando, Polly Rowles, Frank Tweddell, John Randolph and Robert Pike. I wish they had more to play with.

Daily Mirror

November 27, 1950

Not Much Glitter In 'Golden State'

By ROBERT COLEMAN

The Spewacks returned to Broadway Saturday evening with a comedy titled "The Golden State." In this instance, Samuel Spewack is the author and director, and Bella Spewack is the producer. We regret to state that the fabulous Spewacks have failed us this time.

"The Golden State," of course, is California. The plot has to do with the wacky landlady of a rooming-house in Los Angeles, always on the alert for a quick dollar.

Mrs. Morenas, the landlady, considers herself the heiress to Beverly Hills, through a Spanish land grant. Over the protests of her eminently practical son-in-law, she has engaged a disbarred lawyer to fight for her claims. Meanwhile, Mrs. Morenas, the rugged individualist, out of her big heart, has been harboring an assortment of speculators and conservatives.

When the shooting is all over, the delightfully moonstruck old gal has been flim-flammed again by sharp-shooters. But out of the debacle has come a great deal of happiness.

No attraction starring the inimitable Josephine Hull could be without a goodly quota of laughs, but we are sad to report that our cherished Josephine is trapped in the intricacies of an obviously contrived script. But she soars above her material.

Ernest Truex is excellent as a well-meaning mining prospector who complicates matters for his friendly sponsor.

Thanks to Miss Hull, an inspired portrayer of guileless heroines, "The Golden State" has moments of felicity, but they are not enough to save an anemic and incredible comedy.

The New York Times

November 27, 1950

Josephine Hull Stars in 'The Golden State' With Ernest Truex at the Fulton

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Since Josephine Hull is a real sweetheart, any proper American would be reluctant to question the merits of any play in which she is appearing. Mrs. Hull is the motherly person who won the devotion of the town by teetering pleasantly through "You Can't Take It With You," "Arsenic and Old Lace" and "Harvey." Now she is appearing as a star in "The Golden State," which Samuel Spewack wrote for her and which opened at the Fulton on Saturday evening.

In small type it must be hurriedly stated here that "The Golden State" is a thin and languid comedy which is never as funny as it tries to be. It does not make for much of an evening in the theatre.

* * *

With that unpleasant duty quickly out of the way, let's talk about Mrs. Hull, who provides a more admirable subject. She has a heart of gold. At the moment she is playing the part of a happy though irresponsible California lady who believes in horoscopes, dreams, cults, goodwill and everything nice and never quite masters the principles of modern living.

From the point of view of community responsibility the California lady's record is not creditable. She even finds herself chairman of the board of a bogus gold mine and has to visit the District Attorney. But Mrs. Hull is such an upright person with such good manners that you know that the fault is ours and not hers, and that the world ought to be as fine as she thinks it is and that all the rest of us are swine and creeps.

* * *

There must be a lot of acting in her performance somewhere. But THE TIMES' hired theatregoer is unable to detect it. Churning with many emotions and bewildered by all the decisions that have to be made at once, she gives the impression of always being interrupted in something she intended to do but has forgotten. The personality seems tentative. Life just swarms all around her, and most of it is good. She is not cynical or bored. She is perplexed, perhaps. Occasionally she is provoked. Little shadows of unhappiness hurry across her face when she hears something unpleasant. But she is an eager person who is overjoyed by little things.

In another actress, these qualities might be sentimental. But they seem true when Mrs. Hull expresses them. They seem sound and genuine and uncontrived. Although Mrs. Hull is not a sentimental actress, she induces plenty of sentiment in the audience. New York is crowded by men and women who will see that no harm ever comes to her.

* * *

"The Golden State," however, is not a monologue, but a play; and several other actors help Mrs. Hull round out the portrait. The best of them is Ernest Truex, with a big, gray mustache, playing the part of a shiftless, drunken goldminer, and playing it well. Ben Lackland is in there, too, making a particularly good scene, out of a confidence man's disappointment when the parole officer marches him back to jail. Lou Polan, Jocelyn Brando, Polly Rowles, John Randolph, John Hudson and Frank Tweddell do well by some of the other parts.

Too bad "The Golden State" isn't a more sprightly comedy.

Journal American

November 27, 1950

Josephine Hull's Fine Talent Isn't Enough

By JOHN McCLAIN

Josephine Hull, who opened Saturday night at the Fulton Theatre in a new comedy by Sam Spewack called "The Golden State," demonstrated once again that there is not enough talent in the world to wrest a popular success from an impoverished premise.

For me Mrs. Hull can do no wrong. By merely swinging her foot and humming slightly off-key while she telephones she can make me shake the entire row of seats, but as the evening wears on I become aware that nothing much else is happening and I can just laugh so long at the same joke, however well told.

Unhappily, I believe that the single idea which inspires "The Golden State" is somewhat meagre and obvious. Mrs. Hull, an impoverished native daughter of the Golden State of California, runs a boarding house in Los Angeles. One of her roomers is a gold prospector (Ernest Truex), who comes back from the desert with a couple of bags of low grade pay dirt.

He is discouraged because the assayer's office has reported that the gold content is hardly worth the mining. But it is quite another matter, of course, when this same dirt is accidentally deposited in a hole in Mrs. Hull's garden and Mr. Truex quite innocently re-discovers it through his special talents as a human diving rod. Gold in a garden in Los Angeles!

That is the gimmick, and the rest of the proceedings hinge upon the hope this brings to the various boarders, and the deflation which occurs when the truth inevitably outs.

The last act seems to prove, however, that gold is not everything and that most of the characters involved have been spiritually, if not financially, regenerated by the incident.

There is, as I say, a large lode of laughs in Mrs. Hull's performance as the vague and trusting landlady who traces her lineage back to the Spanish Dons and proceeds on the promise of a disbarred lawyer that she actually owns title to all of Beverly Hills, yet is constantly having the gas shut off and the radio removed for non-payment.

Ernest Truex, as the amiable and drunken prospector, strives courageously to maintain the comedy level. The same can be said for the rest of the cast, but I'm afraid the truth is that the whole evening is really a one-act idea.

From the minute Mr. Truex's bags of gold are inadvertently shoveled into Mrs. Hull's garden there is little doubt about what is going to transpire.

And it didn't transpire with enough ingenuity or humor to be entirely satisfactory.

New York Post
HOME NEWS
November 27, 1950

A Lesser California Gold Rush
By Richard Watts Jr.

Everybody is in love with Josephine Hull, and few things in the theatre could cause more widespread rejoicing than the news that she had found another satisfactory vehicle for the display of her incomparably individual talent. Unhappily, Samuel Spewack's new comedy, " The Golden State," which opened at the Fulton Saturday night, is not that vehicle. A placid little fable about the wistful dreams of a quick fortune apparently common to the denizens of Southern California, it is, I fear, as unsuccessful in realizing its hopes as they are.

There is one particular danger in comedies dealing with the madcap, scatterbrained adventures of charming, lovable nitwits. It is that the nitwits will seem scatterbrained without being charming or lovable, and that whatever sympathy is aroused in the audience will be expended on the dull, practical people of the story, who are supposed to supply the disagreeable contrast to the sweet souls of the amiable idiots. That is what happens in "The Golden State." The heroine is likely to be as much of a trial to playgoers as she is to her prosaic son-in-law.

Owning Hollywood

Since the heroine is played by Mrs. Hull, this melancholy fact is alarming proof of the failure of Mr. Spewack's customary inventiveness. The lady is a well-meaning Los Angeles matron, descended from the early Spanish settlers, and she is convinced that she is the rightful heiress to all the land that comprises Beverly Hills and Hollywood. Personally, I wish she'd get it, but her various idiosyncracies, while cute to Mr. Spewack, seemed boring to me, and destroyed sympathy for the suit she was bringing against the State of California.

Then there is an old prospector, who has never given up his belief that some day he will find gold, and he, too, is intended as very lovable. I doubt that he is, despite the fact that he is played by Ernest Truex. Anyway, he and Mrs. Hull think they have found a gold mine in her back yard, and a paroled promoter forms a company, and all the lady's boarders think they are rich, until the whole thing turns out to have been a mistake. The one surprising detail of the story is that, at the end, they are as poor as they were at the play's opening, although presumably happier.

As I have said, Mr. Spewack can, as he has proved in other comedies, be highly ingenious in gathering up a number of strange and picturesque stage characters and setting them down in a morass of comic misadventures, from which they eventually escape by a combination of luck and guile. In "The Golden State," however, the chain of comic events is thin and fragile, and, despite the valiant work of the star and the other players, the necessary amount of humor is not forthcoming. There hasn't been a more desultory play all season.

It is, of course, always a pleasure to see Mrs. Hull, and she and Mr. Truex work with gallant determination, if to little avail. Lou Polan, always a good actor, succeeds in presenting a full-rounded character as an unsuccessful song-writer selling newspapers while waiting for his break, and John Randolph, who was the muscular milkman in last season's "Come Back, Little Sheba," continues to make a good impression by his portrayal of a young fellow without too much confidence in the golden dream. Jocelyn Brando and Polly Rowles, the girls of the tale, haven't much to do. Josephine Hull still needs a play.

"Guys and Dolls"

The New York Times
November 25, 1950

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Out of the pages of Damon Runyon, some able artisans have put together a musical play that Broadway can be proud of. "Guys and Dolls" they call it out of one corner of the mouth. It opened at the Forty-sixth Street last evening. With a well-written book by Jo Swerling and Abe Burrows, and a dynamic score by Frank Loesser, it is a more coherent show than some that have higher artistic pretensions.

But you can count as its highest achievement the fact that it has preserved the friendly spirit of the Runyon literature without patronizing and without any show-shop hokum. It is the story of some gamblers and their unfortunate women who try to fit into the shifty pattern of Broadway life some of the stabilizing factors of marriage and love-making.

* * *

Let one playgoer remark in passing that there is something a little disconcerting about the casual attitude this story takes toward a religious mission which is trying to save a few souls in the neighborhood. But even this intrusion on the way of life of some street-corner salvationists is redeemed by the hearty camaraderie of all the characters of the book. Although they are gamblers, show-girls, cops and adult delinquents, they have their ethics, too, and live in a gaudy, blowzy world that is somehow warm and hospitable. After all, the Broadway culture is simple and sentimental but has a better heart than some cultures that are more literate.

* * *

Everyone concerned with "Guys and Dolls" has cast the show with relish and originality; and George S. Kaufman has never been in better form in the director's box. As the executive officer of the oldest floating crap game in town, Sam Levene gives an excitable and hilarious performance. Vivian Blaine makes something comic out of the lively vulgarity of a night-club leading lady, singing her honky-tonk songs in a shrill but earnest voice. Isabel Bigley does as well by a missionary sergeant who astonishes herself by falling in love with an itinerant gambler. She plays a few enticing tricks on one of Mr. Loesser's most rollicking songs—"If I Were a Bell." As the tall, dark and handsome gambler, Robert Alda keeps the romance enjoyable, tough and surly.

The Runyon milieu is rich in startling types, and "Guys and Dolls" has the most flamboyant population of any show in town. Stubby Kaye, as a rotund sidewalk emissary; Johnny Silver, as a diminutive horse philosopher; B. S. Pully, as a big gun-and-blackjack man from Chicago—are sound, racy members of hallway society; and at last Tom Pedi has got a part that runs more than five minutes as Harry The Horse, executive secretary for a thug. No one could make a more lovable salvationist than Pat Rooney Sr., who sings "More I Cannot Wish" with cordial good-will.

* * *

Everything is all of a piece in this breezy fiction which has been organized as simply and logically as a Runyon story. Michael Kidds' comic ballets of night club production numbers and crap games belong to the production as intimately as Jo Mielziner's affable settings and Alvin Colt's noisy costumes. Mr. Loesser's lyrics and songs have the same affectionate appreciation of the material as the book, which is funny without being self-conscious or mechanical.

From the technical point of view we might as well admit that "Guys and Dolls" is a work of art. It is spontaneous and has form, style and spirit. In view of the source material, that is not astonishing. For Damon Runyon captured the spirit of an idle corner of the town with sympathetic understanding and reproduced it slightly caricatured in the sketches and stories he wrote. "Guys and Dolls" is gusty and uproarious, and it is not too grand to take a friendly, personal interest in the desperate affairs of Broadway's backroom society.

"GUYS AND DOLLS"

Musical fable based on a story by Damon Runyon; book by Jo Swerling and Abe Burrows; music and lyrics by Frank Loesser; settings by Jo Mielziner; dances staged by Michael Kidd; costumes by Alvin Colt; musical direction by Irving Actman; presented by Cy Feuer and Ernest H. Martin at the Forty-sixth Street Theatre, November 24, 1950. The cast:

Nicely-Nicely Johnson.... Stubby Kaye
Benny Southstreet.. Johnny Silver
Rusty Charlie.... Douglas Deane
Sarah Brown..... Isabel Bigley
Arvide Abernathy..... Pat Rooney Sr.
Calvin..... Paul Migan
Agatha..... Margery Oldroyd
Priscilla..... Christine Matsios
Harry the Horse..... Tom Pedi
Lt. Brannigan..... Paul Reed
Nathan Detroit..... Sam Levene
Angie the Ox..... Tony Gardell
Miss Adelaide.... Vivian Blaine
Sky Masterson..... Robert Alda
Joey Biltmore.... Bern Hoffman
Mimi..... Beverly Tassoni
General Matilda B. Carstairs.. Netta Packer
Big Jule..... B. S. Pully
Drunk..... Eddie Phillips
Waiter..... Joe Milan

NEW YORK Herald Tribune
November 25, 1950

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Brassy Broadway

A RACY musical fable of Broadway has come to the Forty-sixth Street Theater to enliven the season. "Guys and Dolls" is based very freely on Damon Runyon yarns, particularly "The Idyll of Miss Sarah Brown." Jo Swerling and Abe Burrows have fashioned a trenchant and cohesive book about the street that is part Coney Island and part the playing ground of underworld characters. The catchy and varied songs by Frank Loesser implement the action at all times and George S. Kaufman has done a singularly adept job of staging. In the leading roles are such unknowns in musical shows as Robert Alda, Vivian Blaine, Sam Levene and Isabel Bigley, but the production's scheme does not demand virtuoso performing. It should suffice that it is pungent, funny and tuneful.

• • •

As was the case in the memorable "Pal Joey," the work uses music and dancing as embellishments to the libretto, rather than making the latter a loose clothesline for assorted capers and vocal numbers. It is doing it the hard way. More the credit to "Guys and Dolls" that the gags and situations are fresh and amusing and that the motley group of figures in the fable emerge with theatrical excitement and considerable conviction. Nathan Detroit and Sky Masterson, the gamblers, are right off the main stem; Sarah Brown and Arvide Abernathy are mission workers you would like to meet, while Miss Adelaide, Nicely-Nicely, Big Jule and Harry the Horse are disreputably engaging. Since Jo Mielziner has outdone himself with his colorful settings and Michael Kidd has conceived some striking dances, including one in a floating crap game, the musical has pace, composition and exhilaration.

• • •

There is a lot more than Runyon material in "Guys and Dolls," but his almost affectionate contemplation of the seamier side of Broadway runs strongly through the doings. Whether some cabaret babes, headed by the brassy Miss Blaine, are singing the comical "Take Back Your Mink," or Miss Bigley and Alda are harmonizing on a captivating love song, "I'll Know," in the Save-A-Soul Mission, the tone of the proceedings is sustained and regaling. Stubby Kaye, Johnny Silver and Douglas Deane are first rate in "Fugue for Tinhorns"; Miss Blaine has a fetching solo in "If I Were a Bell," and Alda is toughly eloquent in "Luck Be a Lady." Then there is a hymn which sounds quite like a real hymn, "Follow the Fold," and a comic ditty entitled "Sit Down, You're Rockin' the Boat."

• • •

Loesser's words and music may not rise to the top stratum of Tin Pan Alley creations, but they never trip up the general gusto of the carnival. Kidd has gone to the heart of Broadway high-jinks for his dance numbers, except for an interlude in Havana which might just as well have been skipped. It is Kaufman, however, who has given "Guys and Dolls" its particular mood and movement. Much of the humor derives from his cunning arrangement of stage business and the show comes off rather triumphantly, for all its repetitive scenes, thanks to his directorial ministering. Incidentally Tom Pedi, Pat Rooney sr. and B. S. Pully are a few of those who aid Levene, Alda and Miss Blaine in contributing bright accents to the fable. "Guys and Dolls" is a notable addition to the season's festivities.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun
November 25, 1950

'Guys and Dolls'—Wow!

Runyonesque Musical a Broadway Story

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Type—Fabulous musical.
Topic—Broadway—see title.
Mood—Satirical, tender and jazzy.
Cast—A new Milky Way.
I find—I love it.

Love for the new musical spread faster last night than fire through dry grass in a high wind. "Guys and Dolls" brings Broadway in off the street so you can see and hear it sitting down.

The show springs from Damon Runyon stories. It recaptures what he knew about Broadway, that its wickedness is tinhorn, but its gallantry is as pure and young as Little Eva.

It is all tender and rough at the same time, the way people who never grown up very much can be tender and rough. The guys are in pursuit of a strolling crap game, and the dolls are in pursuit of a plain gold band.

Engaged 14 Years.

There is a night club artiste, engaged to one Nathan Detroit for 14 years. She has kept her mother at bay with tales of a dozen years of wedded bliss plus the usual multiplication, and would like to clean up her record. Nathan is forever too busy finding new roofs for "the oldest established permanent floating crap game in New York."

The readiest bettor in town gets his heart strings plunked out of line for good when he meets up with, of all things, a Mission Doll. (Salvation Army lass, to another generation).

There is plenty of story about the routes these romances take. But it is good solid story, sharp, entertaining, inventive and honest. Sometimes the transitions are quick, but that is because you are given credit for understanding that the dolls mean what they say, and do what they threaten.

Deserves Stars.

"Guys and Dolls" is a show that deserves gold stars in many departments. To my mind the most startling contributions are the affectionately witty idea and musical vernacular of Frank Loesser's score, and Michael Kidd's sharply staged dances.

It is easier to trace the songs in connection with individual performers, but the dances have to be mentioned by themselves. Two night club scenes reveal as much as anything else in the show just what kind of world these characters inhabit. Their talent is small time, eager and bedazzled, and the choreography satirizes them delightfully.

These numbers and the Cuban local color are improvements on fairly familiar dance ideas, but the Crap Game is a sock affair out of nowhere, with speed, anxiety and momentum.

Lists Three Stars.

The billing lists three stars, Robert Alda caps a picture career and long service in second stem clubs with a solid, winning appearance as the gambler whose religion has a pretty face. Sooner or later everybody is going to say Alda resembles Cary Grant, so we might as well too. Is that bad? He knows how to belt a ballad, and sings like Vaughn Monroe might on a clear day. I hope the theater hangs on to him.

Vivian Blaine is another gift of films to Broadway, and I hope she spends the rest of her life here. This is a night blooming apple blossom who can really sing, clearly dance, and be true to a definite character.

She never walks on stage without scoring in some fashion or other, but then she has the indefinable something that takes your eyes off other people. Loesser was in league with her, clearly, when he wrote about how "A person can develop a cold." And what she does with "Take Back Your Mink" must be seen and heard to be believed. From the latter, the line "It was all a horrible dream!" is my favorite of the year.

Levene Is Real.

Sam Levene is a backbone of wistful bravado and harassed fence straddling, as the maestro of the meandering dotted cubes. He is so real, wearing his brave face, that he makes Broadway seem closer than down the block.

There was a wonderful moment last night when a girl named Isabel Bigley sang a song named "If I Were a Bell." It reminded me of "I Got Rhythm" and "My Heart Belongs to Daddy," and what they did for a couple of other girls. Miss Bigley is the mission lass, and I had a funny feeling last night that she might never again learn a song that hadn't been specifically written for her. Having her in the same show with Miss Blaine produced in me a feeling of being constantly untrue to somebody.

George Kaufman has done a superlative job of putting all this together, and making it roll without getting hysterical. The costumes by Alvin Colt are as clever character work as the theater will find, and the Mielziner sets are rightly garish and gay and warm.

Later on, more must be said of Pat Rooney and the numerous sleepers in the cast who are Guys, and plenty talented, too.

New York Post
HOME NEWS
November 26, 1950

The Lively World of Damon Runyon

By Richard Watts Jr.

The fabulous universe of Damon Runyon, the eminent sage and poet laureate of the Broadway underworld, is transferred to the stage with notable success in "Guys and Dolls," the big, brash and bountiful musical comedy which opened at the Forty-Sixth Street Theatre Friday night.

"Guys and Dolls" is just what it should be to celebrate the Runyon spirit, vigorous, noisy, humorous, tough on the surface and shamelessly sentimental underneath, filled with the salty characters and richly original language sacred to the memory of the Master, and a pleasure to all beholders. There can be no doubt that it is the town's newest hit.

For its emphatic and merited success, the credit goes to a number of skillful people, all of them theatre professionals in the most flattering sense of the term. The only difficulty with writing a review of the new show is that it must be to such a large extent a catalogue of credits. Chiefly, though, the laurel wreath belongs to the delightful and unforgettable writer who inspired it. Although he was an accurate observer, Runyon was basically a creative artist, who turned pigmy underworld characters into fairy tale heroes and wrote a dialogue as wonderfully stylized in its own American way as the lyric speech of any Christopher Fry.

The Runyon Quality

It is to the particular credit of Abe Burrows and Jo Swerling, who wrote the book of "Guys and Dolls," that they have captured the mood and quality of the speech, people and stories of Damon Runyon so effectively without overdoing them too elaborately. I like the new show better when it is being comic and indulging in Runyonesque talk for its own sake than when it is threatening to take its love story and its sentiment a little seriously, but in this respect it is entirely faithful to the spirit of Runyon. He, too, was in his best form when he didn't take his sentimentality too earnestly.

Frank Loesser, who provided the book and lyrics, has likewise kept effectively in the proper mood. He has written some good, tuneful songs, which are already becoming the popular hits that they deserve to be, and his lyrics, in addition to being lively, adept and amusing, retain the Runyon spirit as faithfully as the Burrows-Swerling book. Mr. Loesser has long been recognized as a bright and resourceful song writer, and, with the scores for "Where's Charley?," which I didn't at first properly appreciate, and now "Guys and Dolls," there is no doubt that he is a valuable addition to American musical comedy.

The Gambler and the Girl

The story, which is about Nathan Detroit's floating crap game and the romance between Sky Masterton, the dashing gambler, and Sarah Brown, the innocent girl from the Broadway mission, doesn't really pretend to be anything much, but it is a proper framework for the characteristic activities of the gamblers, horse players, jailbirds, show girls and virtuous ingenues of the Runyon universe. It isn't too often sentimental and it can be tremendously funny when it sets out to be. Since fun is what it is after most of the time, "Guys and Dolls" reveals the Broadway musical show at its best and most hilarious.

George Kaufman has staged it with characteristic skill, vastly aided by the sets of Jo Mielziner and the chorus numbers of Michael Kidd. The cast is excellent. Sam Levene is at his dynamic best as Nathan Detroit, Robert Alda is both talented and likeable as Sky Masterton, and assorted underworld gentlemen are admirably played by Tom Pedi, Stubby Kaye, Johnny Silver and that cultured nightclub refugee, B. S. Pully. Isabel Bigley, a charming newcomer, is a delightful ingenue, and Vivian Blaine is effective, if conventional, as a tough girl with a soft heart. I think Damon Runyon would have been pleased by "Guys and Dolls."

DAILY NEWS
November 25, 1950

'Guys and Dolls' New York's Own Musical Comedy—So Get in Line

By JOHN CHAPMAN

There is only one defect—but a serious one—about the musical, "Guys and Dolls," which opened at the 46th St. Theatre last evening, and I might as well report it now and get on to happier things: The big trouble with "Guys and Dolls" is that a performance of it lasts only one evening, when it ought to last about a week.

I did not want to leave the theatre after the premiere last night and come back here and write a piece about the show. I wanted to hang around, on the chance that they would raise the curtain again and put on a few numbers they'd forgotten—or, at least, start "Guys and Dolls" all over again. For here is New York's own musical comedy—as bright as a dime in a subway grating, as smart as a sidewalk pigeon, as professional as Joe Di Maggio, as enchanting as the skyline, as new as the paper you're holding.

Runyon, More or Less.

"Guys and Dolls" is loosely based on a Damon Runyon story or two, and it concerns such Runyon characters as Harry the Horse, Nicely-Nicely Johnson and Angie the Ox. Its locale is, more or less, Broadway—the curious Broadway which Runyon invented, inhabited by crapshooters and horse-players with narrow chests and big hearts. It has two plots. One concerns a night club blonde named Adelaide who has been engaged to a gambler named Nathan Detroit for 14 years. The other is about a pretty bums' mission worker and a big-time gambler named Sky Masterson. And that's all you need to know about the plots.

In all departments "Guys and Dolls" is a perfect musical comedy. Under the masterful direction of George S. Kaufman, it is swift, crisp and precise, with not a lagging instant. Its book, by Jo Swerling and Abe Burrows, is a work of easy and delightful humor. Its music and lyrics, by Frank Loesser, are so right for the show and so completely lacking in banality, that they amount to an artistic triumph. Another just-right element is the staging of the dances and musical numbers by Michael Kidd; his ballet number about a crap game being played in a sewer is a dazzling bit of invention and execution. Jo Mielziner's sets are, like all Mielziner sets, just right, and so are Alvin Colt's costumes.

I emphasize the foregoing "credits"—and a final big credit to the producers, Feuer and Martin—to make it clear that a really good musical must be built from the ground up. Once the structure is made, the cast cannot help being good.

The Cast Is Just Right.

The cast of "Guys and Dolls" is more than good—it is just right; and there isn't a real Broadway box-office "name" in the lot. The company has been so happily chosen that box office appeal can be forgotten; everybody's got box-office appeal.

The leads include Robert Alda, from the movies, who makes an impressive gambler named sky Masterson; Isabel Bigley as a sweet little missionary in the Broadway jungles; Vivian Blaine as a marriage-minded club blonde, and Sam Levene, an operator of a floating crap game who is her reluctant swain.

These four handle the plot. Then there are fine and picturesque performances of shady characters by B. S. Pully, Tom Pedi, Johnny Silver, Stubby Kaye and others. Mr. Pully's impersonation of a tough mugg from Cicero is one of the season's best performances. Then there is Pat Rooney Sr., beating a mission drum and singing a song, "More I Cannot Wish You," which is worthy of Rooney's old, sure charm. One of the most joyous of the song numbers is Miss Bigley's "*If* I Were a Bell," and the funniest is Miss Blaine's "Adelaide's Lament."

The guys and dolls of "Guys and Dolls" shouldn't ever have to leave New York, because they belong here.

Journal-American

November 25, 1950

The Best Thing Since 'Pal Joey'

By JOHN McCLAIN

This doesn't have to be a very long review because I can state the case of "Guys and Dolls" in one sentence: it is the best and most exciting thing of its kind since "Pal Joey."

I do not class this with "Oklahoma" or "South Pacific." Not that it might not be just as good in its medium, but this is the medium of our town—not the tall corn or the waving palms.

It is a book musical in the tradition of Damon Runyon, from whose stories Jo Swerling and Abe Burrows have fashioned a set of characters who talk and behave in the manner to which the Old Master accustomed them.

It is a fable of the land of Angie the Ox, Harry the Horse, Lt. Brannigan, Nicely - Nicely Johnson and Benny Southstreet.

It is a triumph and a delight, and I think it will last as long as the roof remains on the Forty-sixth Street Theatre, where it opened last night.

From the minute the curtain rises, with a Broadway ballet which sets the mood and a song called "Fugue for Tinhorns," sung by three horse players, to the final reprise of "Guys and Dolls," there is scarcely a moment when you're not either laughing or humming.

Meanwhile you have seen a show which might have stood on its own as a farce, without music, and you have enjoyed some believable ballet and listened to excellent lyrics of some strong songs, well sung.

My favorite numbers were in case you care: "The Oldest Established," a sort of anthem delivered by the incredible characters involved who are singing their reverent respects to "The Oldest Established Permanent Floating Crap Game in New York"; "I'll Know" and "I've Never Been in Love Before"—two solid pop tunes sung by Robert Alda and Isabel Bigley; "Adelaide's Complaint," Vivian Blaine's startled reaction to her discovery that a persistent head cold may be due to the fact that she has been engaged for 14 years and never married; "Take Back Your Mink," in which Miss Blaine and the chorus express righteous indignation and divest themselves of the garments that have been presented them under false assumption; and "Sue Me," which is Sam Levene's reaction to Miss Blaine's plaint that she has, in effect, squandered the best years of her life. Not forgetting, of course, the opening horse-player trio.

All you need to know about the plot is the fact that Sam Levene needs a grand to open his floating crap game and so he bets Robert Alda, a big gambler, exactly that amount that he can't persuade Isabel Bigley a Salvation Army sergeant, to go to Havana with him.

I was particularly entranced by Sam Levene, as always, and Robert Alda, whose authoritative performance in the lead spot may make the lads in Hollywood wonder why they never made better use of his talents when they had him, but cheap.

Isabel Bigley, as the missionary doll, is extremely fetching and Vivian Blaine is perfectly cast as Levene's 14-year fiancee.

I can't imagine where they dug up the chorus of male Runyon characters, but they are all perfect. Among them I became particularly attached to Stubby Kaye, as Nicely-Nicely Johnson; Johnny Silver as Benny Southstreet and B. S. Pully, as Big Jule.

There may not be as many big hits in the show as in, for instance, "South Pacific," but the incidental numbers are uniformly hilarious, and contribute immeasurably to the progress of the plot. The lyrics are sprightly and intelligent. Frank Loesser, take a bow.

Jo Mielziner succeeded in making 17 scenes bright and believable, especially the set for the Crap Game ballet. And I thought the dance direction of Michael Kidd achieved the high standard of the rest of the production.

George S. Kaufman directed. I should say it's as good a job of direction as I've seen in these parts for many a year.

Run, don't walk, to the nearest ticket broker.

Daily Mirror

November 25, 1950

Runyon's 'Guys and Dolls' Proves Magnificent Hit

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Cy Feuer and Ernest Martin brought a musical champ called "Guys and Dolls" to the Forty-sixth Street Theatre last evening. A smart first-night audience took off its gloves and blistered its palms applauding the new arrival. It has everything, as a top-flight stake runner should.

Abe Burrows and Jo Swerling have translated the late and beloved Damon Runyon's story and characters to the stage with admirable skill and affection. Frank Loesser has written a score that will get a big play on the juke boxes, over the radio and in bistros throughout the land. His lyrics are especially notable in that they help Burrows' topical gags to further the plot.

Feuer and Martin have done a perfect job of casting, and director George S. Kaufman has used the players with telling effect. Michael Kidd's choreography, Jo Miezeler's colorful brash sets and Alvin Colt's descriptive costumes are other assets of the solid click.

* * *

"Guys and Dolls," happily programmed as a "musical fable of Broadway," has to do with a big-time gambler named Sky Masterson, for whom the sky is the limit when it comes to a bet. He even wagers Nathan Detroit, proprietor of a floating crap game, that he can take an earnest mission belle to Havana for dinner. To do so, he promises to deliver at least a dozen sinners to a prayer meeting at her soul-saving parlor.

How he makes good on the bargain, we shan't tell you. To do so might spoil your enjoyment of the show when you see it. But it's amazing and amusing. Among these assorted Runyon characters are Nicely-Nicely Johnson, Benny Southstreet, Harry the Horse, Angie the Ox and Big Jule. There are tinhorns and toughies, guys and dolls.

They would lift the fillings out of your teeth by chicanery or at the point of a gun. They're not exactly the type you'd invite to your home for an evening of sociable bridge. But you can't help liking the lot of them, because they have hearts to match their larcenous instincts. We found them all fascinating and funny.

Robert Alda is a superlative Sky Masterson. He's slick, handsome and persuasive. When he sings, it's like a lug and not a trained Met tenor. He killed us with that black "thousand-mile shirt," trademark of railroad boomers and fancy gamblers. Vivian Blaine, heretofore a nice movie ingenue, is terrific as the nasal, nightclub canary, who spends 14 years getting Nathan Detroit to an altar. Her electric personality sparks and paces the hi-jinks beautifully.

Sam Levene is immense as the hapless and harrassed Nathan. He makes you roar with a mere lift of an eyebrow or a shrug of the shoulders. Isabel Bigley is quite wonderful as the mission lassie. Stubby Kaye, B. S. Pully, Tom Pedi, Pat Rooney, Sr., Johnny Silver, Paul Reed and Netta Packer are outstanding in other roles. Stubby, a rotund guy with a remarkably sweet voice, tied up the proceedings in the second act.

An onrushing deadline prevents our saluting the other delightful participants.

"Guys and Dolls" is a heart-warming and hilarious re-creation of Runyon's kaleidoscopic cosmos of muggs and molls. We think Damon would have relished it as much as we did. Remember, we warned you months ago to buy your tickets early for this one. So if you have to wait a long time to glimpse it, don't blame us.

"Ring Round the Moon"

Daily Mirror

November 24, 1950

'Ring Round the Moon' Is Polished Fun

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Travelers returning from London over the past few months have been talking about "Ring Round the Moon," a charade by Jean Anouilh. What provoked some of the talk is the fact that it had been translated from the French by Britain's current, clever, wonder boy, Christopher Fry.

Conversation centered, too, around a novel production, designed by Oliver Messel, and a wonderfully nostalgic dance sequence. Last evening, stay-at-homes like us had an opportunity to understand what the reports had all been about, when Gilbert Miller brought an American presentation of "Ring Round the Moon" to the Martin Beck Theatre.

Miller, who also staged our version, has dispensed with the Messel sets, substituting scenery and curtains by Georges Wakhevitch and Raoul Dufy, under the supervision of Raymond Sovey. That sounds kind of complicated, but it all adds up to something very attractive and effective. Stunning 1912 costumes by Castillo and incidental music by Francis Poulenc complement them handsomely, in establishing a gay and festive mood.

"Ring Round the Moon" is a delightfully wacky period piece about a cynical young Frenchman, who hires a poor and pretty dancer to appear at a ball he gives at his aunt's chateau in Auvergne, in the hope that his very nice twin brother will fall in love with her and out of love with the spoiled heiress to whom he is engaged.

For a while, the scheme backfires. The girl becomes fond of her employer instead, but in the end everything works out just about as he had planned it, with the exception that he himself is snared by the heiress under the illusion that her nouveau riche father had lost his weath.

To give you an idea of the flavor of "Ring Round the Moon," a bewildered butler at one point exclaims, "I feel like a beetle in bedlam." But it is graceful, charming, moonstruck bedlam. As for Fry's dialogue, it is certainly less distinguished than that he penned for "The Lady's Not for Burning," but it is easier to follow and understand.

Lucile Watson, as the wheelchaired and high-spirited mistress of the chateau, gives a crisply sparkling performance. Stella Andrew is bewitching as the young dancer. Denholm Elliott is dexterity itself as both of the twins. Oscar Karlweis plays the disillusioned, dyspeptic millionaire-father with wry, and sometimes touching, humor.

Brenda Forbes, Neva Patterson, Georgina Cookson, Michael Evans, Francis Compton, Cynthia Latham and Philip Tonge do justice to the other roles. Miss Cookson and Evans, stopped the show with their hilarious, tongue-in-cheek impression of an intricate, dated tango. Ted Cappy's satiric choreography took you right back to the days of the Castles and Maurice and Walton.

"Ring Round the Moon" is no comedy masterpiece. We doubt that it was intended to be one. But if you're willing to settle for an evening of polished and pleasant fun, we think you'll find it at the Martin Beck. Somehow, it's engaging, Gallic lunacy kept reminding us of "The Mad Woman of Chaillot."

"RING ROUND THE MOON"

Comedy by Jean Anouilh; translated by Christopher Fry; staged by Gilbert Miller; settings by Raymond Sovey; music by Francis Poulenc; costumes by Castillo; presented by Mr. Miller at the Martin Beck Theatre, November 23, 1950. The cast:

Joshua.....Francis Compton
Hugo.....Denholm Elliott
Frederic.....Denholm Elliott
Diana Messerschmann....
Neva Patterson
Lady India...Georgina Cookson
Patrice Bombelles.....
Michael Evans
Madame Desmermortes...
Lucile Watson
Capulat.....Cynthia Latham
Messerschmann.....
Oscar Karlweis
Romainville.....Philip Tonge
Isabelle.....Stella Andrew
Her Mother.....Brenda Forbes
A General.....Marcel Dill
Footmen.....William Allyn
and Bennett Martin

Synopsis: The play takes place in the winter garden of Madame Desmermortes' chateau in Auvergne, France, in the spring of 1912. Act I. Scene 1. Morning. Scene 2. Before the ball. Scene 3. The Ball. Act II. Scene 1. After supper. Scene 2. Dawn.

New York Post

HOME NEWS

November 24, 1950

More Cheering News From Mr. Fry

By Richard Watts Jr.

It is becoming clear that the name of Christopher Fry is going to be as important here as it is in England. Although Mr. Fry is down only as translator of Jean Anouilh's "Ring Round the Moon," which opened at the Martin Beck last night, his lovely, playful gift for words is so clearly in evidence that the spirit of the occasion seems distinctively his. The result is a gay and enchanting kind of sophisticated fairy tale, urbane, graceful and mockingly elegant, half sentimental and half bantering, and one of the civilized pleasures of the season's playgoing.

Once more Mr. Fry brings back the ear as a necessary adjunct to the theatre. To enjoy the play called in English "Ring Round the Moon," it is necessary that you find a sort of sensuous joy in the sound of graceful phrases. Unlike "The Lady's Not for Burning," it is written in prose, but it is prose that sings and sparkles and possesses a cool and imperturbable wit and a frank satisfaction in its own calm elegance. I don't like to push comparisons too far, but there were times when this "charade with music," as producer Gilbert Miller calls it, reminded me of what the great Max Beerbohm might have witten for the stage.

The Fairy Tale

The Anouilh-Fry fable is frankly mannered, artificial and lacking in deeper seriousness, although it has more of human warmth than Mr. Fry appears to achieve when he is writing alone. The story is unashamedly of the conventional, Cinderella fairy-tale type. A young ballet dancer is hired by one of a pair of twins to captivate his sentimental brother, after which the cynical twin expects to expose her vulgar duplicity for the sport of it. You won't be surprised to learn that the girl's honest loveliness undoes his scheme. But the authors don't plan to surprise you. What interests them is the manner of their story telling.

The manner, it seems to me, is delightful. There are times when the fable does wear a little thin. Although Mr. Miller has picked an excellent cast, there are occasions when the differing acting styles get slightly in the way of the play's graceful rhythms. Happily, the slow movements and the flaws in production are few and not of major importance. Most of the time everything moves along with the greatest ease and skill. Not since the best of the Molnar plays, I think, has the combination of sophisticated sentiment and urbane mockery been so thoroughly engaging and completely charming in the proper adult manner.

Sophisticated sentiment can, of course, sometimes be too fraudulent for comfort, but in "Ring Round the Moon," the sentiment can be oddly touching. This is chiefly due to the wonderfully charming and skillful portrayal of the ballet dancer by a lovely newcomer from England named Stella Andrew. The most showy part is the dual role of the twins, and Denholm Elliott manages the differentiation between the two characters with much skill. But it is Miss Andrew, an exceptionally delightful ingenue, who gives the "charade" its quality of warmth and heart, and she is most welcome to the New York stage.

Lucile Watson, who gives quality to every role she plays, is again a delight as a wise old matron, and reminds us once more what a distinguished actress she is. Oscar Karlweis as an unhappy millionaire has some excellent scenes, and there are helpful portrayals by Brenda Forbes, Francis Compton and Georgina Cookson, although Miss Cookson is inclined to be inaudible in her big scene. The attractive Neva Patterson, as the play's only approach to a disagreeable character, demonstrates again that she is one of our oncoming young actresses. The set, the atmospheric curtains apd the incidental music add to the pleasure of a welcome evening in the theatre.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

November 24, 1950

By HOWARD BARNES

Fireworks and Fun

THERE is a rare collaboration of talents in "Ring Round the Moon," a lovely and delectable theatrical trifle that has come to the Martin Beck. The charade with music, as Christopher Fry likes to call his translation of Jean Anouilh's "L'Invitation au Chateau," is an exquisite, well-spoken and frequently provocative farce. Author and adapter have had a keen sense of manners, social and financial values, and caricature in their comic fantasy about a fabulous ball in an Auvergne chateau in the spring of 1912. Denholm Elliott, Lucile Watson, Stella Andrew and Oscar Karlweis enhance a series of random situations with their artful impersonations and others in the company are beautifully matched in the gay charade.

"Ring Round the Moon" is, if anything, too prodigal in its invention. There are rich and handsome twins of completely opposite temperaments, played with brilliant contrast by Elliott, who gets on and off stage as Hugo and Frederic in a miraculous manner. Hugo introduces a ballet dancer to break up Frederic's infatuation with an heiress, a dowager aunt cooks up schemes within schemes and a multi-millionaire tries to ruin himself only to find himself twice as rich as ever. In various sub-plots a niece of Mme. Desmermortes deceives her Croesus lover with his secretary, a couple of elderly duet players resume their musical affinity in curious circumstances and surroundings and a pompus patron of the arts is lost in a shimmering shuffle.

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Gilbert Miller has produced and staged the interlocking conversation pieces admirably. The players are right for their roles, Georges Wakhevitch's original French setting has been cleverly supervised and lighted by Raymond Sovey, the Francis Poulenc music is evocative without being obtrusive and Castillo's costumes are wonderfully in period. Moreover there are colorful and arresting curtains by Raoul Dufy to punctuate the action. Since Fry has been inspired in transferring Gallic moods and phrases to their Anglo-Saxon equivalents, the work has fluency as well as splendor. It is too bad that the vagaries of the play do not add up better to a cumulative and comic whole.

Elliott employs a magician's wand in his quick changes from an arrogant and gilded youth who wants to turn an artificial world upside down to the bravely shy twin who discovers at the last moment that he loves the poor comely puppet hired by Hugo. Miss Watson, back in the theater after too long an absence, is immense as Mme. Desmermortes, complaining in her wheelchair that she is like Robinson Crusoe without initiative and Karlweis is fine as the magnate who tears up banknotes, sells himself short and starts back to Cracow in borrowed clothes in order to make his daughter pennilness and therefore desirable to Hugo. Stella Andrew, for her part, is a charming Cinderella, matching pride and wits with various members of a rarefied society.

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In addition to these featured performers, Brenda Forbes and Cynthia Latham have some engaging interludes as the piano students who find each other after many years. Georgina Cookson and Michael Evans carry on a languid affair with deft humor, particularly in a hilarious burlesque tango. Francis Compton is a properly crumbling butler and Neva Patterson is a fiery and spoiled heiress. "Ring Round the Moon" has all the stuff of an irresistible comedy, but it goes off much like the fireworks display which climaxes the charade.

The New York Times

November 24, 1950

Fry's Version of 'Ring Round Moon' From the French of Jean Anouilh

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Realizing perhaps that "Ring Round the Moon" is not a conventional comedy, they refer to it in the program as "a charade with music." "They" are Jean Anouilh, who wrote it in French, and Christopher Fry, who has made the translation. M. Anouilh is the most interesting of the contemporary French theatre writers, and Mr. Fry holds a similar rank in England. Thanks to Gilbert Miller, the production which opened at the Martin Beck last evening is enchanting to look at and it includes a royal performance by Lucile Watson as a witty-minded matriarch.

Is it permissible for a theatregoer to be of two minds about the whole work? For "Ring Round the Moon" is a play of many moods—wistfully romantic, satiric, fantastic and thoroughly moral, withal. M. Anouilh seems to be anatomizing love and lovers, separating the gold from the dross, sincere in his fundamental choices but writing with his tongue in his cheek. Mr. Fry's translation is beautifully done with spirit, humor and loveliness.

To make his points about love, M. Anouilh has invented a fable about twin brothers — Frederic, who is shy and sensitive, and Hugo, who is heartless and aggressive. Frederic is in love with a hussy who is in love with Hugo. To save Frederic from an unhappy marriage, Hugo tries to distract him by bringing to a ball a beautiful dancer who masquerades as a mysterious personage and becomes the triumph of the occasion. But the beautiful dancer is not an automaton. She is a susceptible maiden in her own right. She not only breaks up all the cynical romances that have been going on before she arrived but loses her own heart as well.

Since "Ring Round the Moon" is presented as a charade and not a play, perhaps we should not take too severe a point of view of such a plot. The advantages are considerable. M. Anouilh is not a literal writer, and the plot makes a platform where he can offer a number of tender and humorous scenes. Thanks to the festive setting, designed by Georges Wakhevitch, the gorgeous period costumes by Castillo and the entrancing music composed by Francis Poulenc, "Ring Round the Moon" has a sensuous quality that is wholly entrancing.

And the acting is off the top shelf. Miss Watson has never been more brilliant. She is formidably patrician and also wise and witty and mischievous. Denholm Elliott gives a remarkable performance as both of the twin brothers, differentiating between them more by tones of acting than by devices. There is a rapturous performance by Stella Andrew as the disconsolate ballet dancer. As a rich man with a guilty conscience, Oscar Karlweis is admirably dry, gentlemanly and sardonic.

Although the cast is a large one, it includes many excellent actors with individual styles and contrasts. Georgina Cookson as a flamboyant flirt, Neva Patterson as a woman who would like to be a femme fatale, Francis Compton as a sharp-witted butler, Philip Tonge as a nervous patron of the arts, Brenda Forbes as a gaudy bourgeoise, Michael Evans as the cautious lover of his boss's mistress, Cynthia Latham as a dull-minded lady's companion—they all give exhilirating performances in many moods under Mr. Miller's direction.

Obviously, this is a performance of many individual splendors strewn carelessly through an interesting and capricious evening. But still "Ring Round the Moon" gives an impression of being enervated at the source as though M. Anouilh were writing with his finger-tips. It seems to derive from something close to boredom in his own mind, as though he did not really care much about what he is doing. And isn't it odd that a play of modern ideas slips back lazily into the romantic theatre clichés of twenty-five and thirty years ago? There is something incomplete about this beguiling charade. Perhaps M. Anouilh only half believes in it.

Journal American

November 24, 1950

Tops as Production But Is Story Worth It?

By JOHN McCLAIN

One of the season's most widely-heralded productions, "Ring Round the Moon," was brought into the Martin Beck Theatre last night under the auspices of Gilbert Miller. It arrived in a Rolls-Royce and made its entrance on a red velvet carpet.

There were intermediate curtains by Raoul Dufy, the translation of the original Jean Anouilh play was by no less than Christopher Fry, and the cast contained such solid regulars as Lucile Watson, Oscar Karlweis, Brenda Forbes and Philip Tonge, plus the presence of two pleasing prodigies, Denholm Elliott and Stella Andrew.

Despite all this, I thought it should have been more amusing.

This same "charade with music" has been a giant success in Paris, London and other capitols of Europe, but it didn't seem to me last night that it was destined to equal glory here. That could be due to structural changes, the difference in cast or the fact that American audiences are notably unpredictable. If you ask me, I'll settle for the last.

The script was obviously rewritten only slightly and the cast was superb. I guess we are just less fascinated by language in great quantity (because of our famous impatience), and we do not always laugh at the same jokes.

• • •

LONG ON TALK.

"Ring Round the Moon" is extremely talky, and much of it is delightful and lyrical in the Christopher Fry manner.

Lucille Watson is given to many incisive monologues on the general hypocrisy of life

which are enchanting in an extraneous way, and Mr. Elliott is frequently required to occupy three or four minutes to deliver a pronunciamento which might not have been so charming cut to 10 seconds, but which would have served the plot as well.

On the credit side, there is a truly raucous scene played entirely while Georgina Cookson and Michael Evans dance a tango in the clothes and the manner of the times (1912). And there is another in which Mr. Karlweis endeavors to convince Miss Andrew that she should take a bribe to leave the premises.

His frustration at her insistence that she was going anyway and doesn't want the money is such that he finally tears up all the money on his person and calls his brokers to dissolve his fortune.

* * *

PLOT CLEVER.

The plot itself is ingenious enough. There are two identical brothers, both played by Mr. Elliott. Hugo is self-assured, dominant and frigid; Frederic is timorous, loyal and in love with a rich meanie named Diana Messerchmann (Neva Patterson). Although they are engaged she really craves Hugo.

But Hugo is not going for this. Instead, he contrives to bring to the grand ball a simple ballet dancer, who happens to be radiantly beautiful, in the hope that she will captivate his unhappy brother.

It seems the hard way to achieve his end, what with all the attendant confusion of her monstrous mother (Brenda Forbes), the fact that his aunt (Lucile Watson) gets wise to the plot and double-crosses him, but you can be assured that everything works out for the best in the end.

The single Winter Garden set by Georges Wakhevitch is handsome and practical, and the incidental music by Francis Poulenc adds immeasurably to the mood.

I have never seen a better production, but I'm sorry to submit that I don't think the story lives up to it. Not over here, anyway.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

November 24, 1950

Fantasy Features Dual Role

'Ring Round the Moon' A Fragmentary Play

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Type—Fantasy.
Production—Elegant.
Aura—Incoherent.
Performance—Patchy.
I Find—Spotty gaiety and random charm.

"Ring Round the Moon" is billed as a charade with music. It is rather like a photo album of the year 1912, with brief glimpses of some trivial people and slight indications of their relationships and backgrounds.

I suspect that the present performance at the Martin Beck just misses the spirit in which the play was intended.

It is uninspired because it has no mean level of manner or intention from which it can wander and return.

The play is as fragmentary as a plotless ballet. The main story has to do with twin brothers, an heiress engaged to the wrong one of them, and a ballet dancer hired to stimulate jealousy. There is also a tart, elderly mistress of the chateau where everything takes place, and a millionaire, whose mistress is in love with his secretary.

The dancer has a mother who proves to be the long-lost friend of the hostess' companion.

Physically the play leaves nothing to be asked for. In performance it simply does not consistently captivate. It lacks elevation. Its melancholy moments are gentle and touching, but its frivolity is never gay.

Lucile Watson plays the hostess of the ball at which the action takes place. She is testy, nosey and bossy in an agreeable manner, tied as she is to her wheelchair. She manages a torrent of chatter with remarkable definition, and imbues the play with affirmative spirit when she is too rarely in evidence.

Oscar Karlweis is the bored millionaire, truly a figure which makes this play a fairy tale for grownups, as he finally discovers that not even by tearing up his money can he recapture any real joy.

Denholm Elliott plays the twin brothers, one ruthless and one shy, with great aplomb.

Stella Andrew is lovely as the ballet dancer. The role demands great grace and fluid motion, but she ornaments it beyond the call of duty.

DAILY NEWS

November 24, 1950

'Ring Round the Moon' Runs Rings Round a Befuddled Play Reviewer

By JOHN CHAPMAN

I cannot report to you what "Ring Round the Moon" is about. As Mark Twain's traveling companion, Bemis, would have put it, it is too many for me. But I can tell you some of what I saw and heard at the first performance of the play last evening at the Martin Beck Theatre.

Foremost in my mind is Gilbert Miller's physical setup for the affair, which the program calls "a charade with music." It is the smartest, handsomest production of the season, with a wonderful garden setting designed by George Wakhevitch, enchanting 1912 Parisian costumes by Castillo, and a series of Raoul Dufy curtains which are used to break up the several scenes of the two acts. I think the first act is slightly longer than the Liebestodt, but it seems a bit quicker on account of Monsieur Dufy's amusing drops.

The Old Corsican Brothers.

From now on my mind gets a little hazy. I can remember Denholm Elliott, a personable actor in white tie and tails, playing twin brothers. Mr. Elliott is a young man-about-town named Hugo at one moment, and at the next—which is just as soon as he can walk around a potted palm or a stage-hand—he is a meek and sensitive young man named Frederic, wearing the same suit. Everybody, by the way, wears white tie and tails in "Ring Round the Moon," for this is a very posh play.

I can remember a beautiful young lady, Stella Andrew, wearing a beautiful white gown and a perpetual expression of bewilderment as she plays a poor but honest ballet dancer who has been hired to pose as a lady in the handsome garden setting. I recall that the garden belongs to a chateau in the French Auvergne, and that the chateau belongs to a comedienne named Lucile Watson, who rides around in a wheel chair and makes dry remarks. Well, fairly dry, anyhow.

Plenty of People to Talk To.

It seems to me there was a party on at this chateau, and among the guests are Neva Patterson, an heiress; Georgina Cookson, mistress of Miss Patterson's father, who is none other than Oscar Karlweis done up in a Franz Joseph mustache; Michael Evans, who is secretly in love with Miss Cookson; Francis Compton, the Gilbert Millers' private butler; Philip Tonge, one of the best monocle-poppers in the business, and Brenda Forbes, who plays Miss Andrew's mother as if her life depended on it.

If memory serves, all these people are talking practically all the time—about Life, and Love, and Money. They just must have been talking, for this play, "Ring Round the Moon," was first written in French by Jean Anouilh (pronounced "ennui") and later adapted by Christopher Fry (pronounced "fry"). But all but two of them were so stodgy or so utterly chichi that I didn't get very much out of what they said.

The two exceptions were Miss Cookson and Mr. Evans. They turn in an enchanting performance of making social small-talk while performing a perfect Rudolph Valentino - Vilma Banky tango. You have no idea how funny it is. I wish Mr. Miller would send everybody else home and let this pair act the whole play—while dancing, of course. This would be simply utter.

"The Relapse"

NEW YORK Herald Tribune
November 23, 1950

By HOWARD BARNES

Elegant Resurrection

THE difficult task of resurrecting a Restoration comedy of manners is accomplished with elegance and considerable elan in the Theater Guild's production of "The Relapse, or Virtue in Danger" at the Morosco. The Sir John Vanbrugh farce, a sequel to colley Cibber's "Love's Last Shift", is 254 years old, almost to the day. Although it deals with the fripperies and seductions of a period notable for its excesses, it is more archaic than scandalous. When Cyril Ritchard, as the prince of coxcombs, is tripping across the stage, or delivering asides to the audience, the intrigues within intrigues become rich in wit and satire. Many of the scenes have little more than a museum interest.

It is a signal tour de force that Ritchard achieves in the same role he portrayed two seasons ago in the London revival of the play. His Lord Foppington, once Sir Novelty Fashion, dominates the piece amusingly, for all of Vanbrugh's plotting and sub-plotting. Concious that this is the first American production of "The Relapse, or Virtue in Danger," he makes a disarming introductory speech to the audience in modern evening dress and then dons periwig, satins and silks to become a ridiculously humorous figure of 1698. The Amanda and Loveless of "Love's Last Shift" have their tilts over the latter's infidelity again, but they and their plight are somewhat musty, while Foppington is still vital and funny.

Ritchard's direction is as assured as his stylish characterization. The handsome settings and costumes of Robert O'Hearn never clutter up, or distract from the fast-paced action. The buffoonery that the dramatist-architect resorted to in the chapters where Lord Foppington's brother, Tom, cheats him out of a rich bride is high and hilarious burlesque and even the laggard scenes celebrating cuckoldry, adultery and amatory schemes have a certain theatrical quality. Vanbrugh's commentary on fashionable existence in London following the Puritan era is specialized and rather remote today, but it has been admirably mounted at the Morosco.

In a very large cast, including members of the Brattle Theater Company from Cambridge, Ruth Matteson and Madge Elliott perform with particular relish. The former is gravely virtuous as Amanda, giving something of solidity from which the quips can carom. Miss Elliott is properly seductive and immoral as the cousin who brings about Loveless's relapse. Jon Emery plays the last-named part, Robert Fletcher is good as Tom and Thayer David has some lusty passages as old Sir John Tunbelly, who gives away his daughter, Hoyden, to the wrong brother. Jan Farrand also deserves mention as the eager country girl, who is not averse to marrying twice, and Philippa Evans is excellent as the nurse. "The Relapse, or Virtue in Danger" is very much a period piece, defying the passage of centuries, but it still retains a fair measure of gaiety and charm.

"THE RELAPSE"

Comedy by Sir John Vanbrugh; staged by Cyril Ritchard, assisted by Albert Marre; settings and costumes by Robert O'Hearn; presented by the Theatre Guild at the Morosco Theatre, November 22, 1950. The cast:

Loveless.....John Emery
Amanda.....Ruth Matteson
Lory.....Bryant Haliday
Young Fashion..Robert Fletcher
Tugg.....Monford Trull
Lord Foppington..Cyril Ritchard
Page.....Kenneth Scott
La Varole.....Albert Marre
Foretop.....Skedge Miller
Mendlegs.....George Drew
Mrs. Calicoe.....Jeanne Tufts
Shoemaker.....Carl Don
Taylor.....Donald Stevens
Coupler.....Jerry Kilty
Berinthia.....Madge Elliott
Syringe.....Earl Montgomery
Worthy.....Murray Matheson
Abigail.....Priscilla Morrill
Sir Tunbelly Clumsey.....
Thayer David
Miss Hoyden.....Jan Farrand
Nurse.....Philippa Bevans
Bull.....Earl Montgomery
Jeremy.....Carl Don
Sir John Friendly.....
Donald Stevens

Synopsis: Act I. Scene 1. Loveless' Country Garden. Scene 2. A Street in London. Scene 3. Lord Foppington's Dressing Room. Scene 4. Loveless' Lodging in London. Act II. Scene 1. Lord Foppington's Dressing Room. Scene 2. Loveless' Garden in London. Scene 3. The gate outside Sir Tunbelly's Manor. Scene 4. Interior of the Manor. Scene 5. Berinthia's Chamber. Act III. Scene 1. Interior of Sir Tunbelly's Manor. Scene 2. Berinthia's chamber. Scene 3. A Street in London. Scene 4. Loveless' Lodging. The Time: 1695. Shortly after the restoration of the monarchy following the Puritan era.

New York Post
HOME NEWS
November 24, 1950

Cyril Ritchard Scores In Restoration Play

By RICHARD WATTS JR.

Cyril Ritchard, an occasional and welcome visitor from the English stage, has a wonderful comic style for the playing of extravagant farcical roles in the classic British comedies, and he is in his best form in the revival of Sir John Vanbrugh's "The Relapse," which opened at the Morosco Wednesday night. On the whole, I cannot say that "The Relapse" is one of my favorite works in the Restoration tradition, but Mr. Ritchard's artful and hilarious caricature of the ridiculous rake, Lord Foppington, is such a masterpiece of mannered absurdity that he makes much of the old play seem still fresh and alive.

Style, of course, is everything in these celebrated, if rarely seen or read, comedies, and Mr. Ritchard possesses it in abundance. He isn't afraid to go in for the most outrageous extravagance, and yet he appears to know just where to stop and how to avoid the pitfalls, so perilous to most actors in farcical roles of past centuries, of being either self-conscious or pedantic in his period activities. You may remember how fine he was in "Love For Love" and I saw him in London in that comedy classic of a later century, "The Importance of Being Earnest." I can pay him no higher tribute than to say he is as equally good in "The Relapse."

Vanbrugh, as every one who reads up on the history of the English theatre knows, lacked the wit and grace of Congreve, but he possessed a kind of unsentimental realism about manners and morals that gave a healthy coarseness to his rowdy humor. We are not particularly sensitive about rough-and-ready sex comedy these days, particularly if it is decked out in the laces and furbelows of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries, and audiences are not likely to be shocked by the frankness or the single-minded pursuit of amours in "The Relapse." But its insistence on one note can grow fairly monotonous.

Plot and Subplot

That monotony, I think, becomes a little too evident for comfort from time to time, and there are occasions when you may even sympathize a bit with the puritan Jeremy Collier's famous distaste for the subject matter of Vanbrugh and his colleagues. It does sometimes seem that one plot about the abundant sex life of 1695, or thereabouts, is enough without the addition of a couple of subplots on the same subject. But it is pleasant to observe that there still is some fun in the old play, and it certainly is in evidence whenever Mr. Ritchard is on the stage. I merely wish the other plots didn't get in his way so often.

Whatever else may be said against the contemporary theatre, we have a surprising number of good actors left, but not many of them are possessors of the style required for the Restoration plays. None of the others in the cast of "The Relapse" can approach Cyril Ritchard in this respect, but Madge Elliot, John Emery, Ruth Matteson, Jan Farrand and Thayer David—who plays a fellow with the handsome name of Sir Tunbelly Clumsey—are among those who come off reasonably well. But the chief virtue for today of a classic comedy is that it provides a proper field day for Cyril Ritchard.

The New York Times

November 23, 1950

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

When we are two and a half centuries old, most of us will not look as lively as Sir John Vanbrugh's "The Relapse," which the Theatre Guild put on at the Morosco last evening. But it is fair to add that even "The Relapse" does not look in the best of health.

It is distinguished chiefly by the accomplished and amusing acting of Cyril Ritchard in the part of Lord Foppington. Three seasons ago New York saw him in John Gielgud's production of Congreve's "Love for Love." Mr. Ritchard wears the costumes of the Restoration period with skill and relish, speaks with an ostentatious snobbery that is consistently funny, and has a mincing walk that reawakens some of the laughter that must have greeted "The Relapse" when it was new.

* * *

Did they play Restoration comedy as broadly in those days? Probably they did, for there would not be much point in playing satire naturalistically. But whether they did or not is beside the point. For Mr. Ritchard's airs and graces, his stylized condescension and fripperies are vastly entertaining, which is all that anyone should expect from a comedy.

Apart from Mr. Ritchard, the going is not so light and the spirit is not so dry and mettlesome. None of the other players has so elegant a style. They play heartily instead of wittily and they have to work to get a laugh. "She Stoops to Conquer" might be comic if it were played in this roistering manner, but "The Relapse" needs a much more brittle performance.

* * *

Since "The Relapse" is fairly aged now it has a special license for bawdry. When it was new Vanbrugh protested that the charges of blasphemy and bawdry were not justified by the script, although he did allow that one of the actors was drunk on the opening night. Using the sort of irony that is still common today, he said that he doubted he could ever write a play lewd enough to please the well-bred people of the town.

"The Relapse" is probably lewd enough to please the educated people of today. But it is not the most outrageous of the Restoration variations on the popular theme of adultery. And it has plot enough for a musical comedy, some of which is not as shocking as you might suppose.

The current production has been equipped with some pleasantly old-fashioned scenery designed by Robert O'Hearn, and the costumes are elaborate and agreeable. Under Mr. Ritchard's direction, the cast includes Madge Elliott as a dissolute widow, John Emery and Ruth Matteson as a somewhat skittish married couple, Robert Fletcher as a well-born adventurer, Bryant Haliday as his servant, Jan Farrand as a rural hoyden and a lot of other actors. Many of them came from the Brattle Theatre in Cambridge.

* * *

They are all in good health and high spirits, willing to entertain the audience in any way that works. But in the opinion of one theatregoer, Mr. Ritchard is the only one who has the style for Vanbrugh's brand of humor. He uses the rapier. He is arid, supercilious and artificial, and he turns Lord Foppington into a brightly painted automaton. None of the other actors plays so lightly, and nothing else in this busy production is so gay.

Journal-American

November 24, 1950

Revival Has Limited Appeal

By JOHN McCLAIN

Well, you gotta like Restoration drama, that's all, or you won't like the proceedings which the Theatre Guild presented at the Morosco Theatre Wednesday evening, entitled "The Relapse, or Virtue in Danger."

This bijou was first displayed in London over two centuries ago, the product of a young nobleman named Sir John Vanbrugh, and its current reincarnation has been given the full treatment by the Guild: Cyril Ritchard, directing and starring with Madge Elliot, John Emery, Ruth Matteson, and a large cast lending them admirable and expensive support; unlimited and ingenious sets by Robert O'Hearn and a long list of similar credits including Perfume and Toiletries by Mary Dunhill, Inc., which I was unfortunately unable to appreciate due to a slight head cold.

But, I repeat, you gotta like this theatrical form. It is full of men, or semi-men, called Fops; there is endless preoccupation with the peacock attire of the day, and everybody has a wonderful, stylized approach to sex. You don't have an affair unless all parties concerned have become familiar with a scenario which has been supplied well in advance.

There is also much use of the familiar "aside," the device wherein one of the players can turn to the audience and, putting her hand to her mouth (as if to relay a confidence), declaim in a loud voice: "Methinks this guy is a jerk. But he is loaded and so I will knock him off anyway—forsooth."

* * *

The plot of "Relapse" involves a mincing Lord Foppington, played by Mr. Ritchard; his destitute but worthy brother (Robert Fletcher), and Miss Hoyden, (Jan Farrand), heiress to the great estate of her uncouth old man, Sir Tunbelly Clumsey (Thayer David).

His Lordship Foppington, although heavy with coin of the realm, has blown most of it and hence made arrangements through a professional matchmaker to marry Miss Hoyden, sight unseen. His younger and penceless brother arrived in London and makes an unsuccessful attempt to put the chew on the Lord to the extent of mere get-away guineas.

When shunned, he decides to go out to the country and use his elder brother's name to captivate and marry the folding money represented by Miss Hoyden. She proves to be a most enchanting and cooperative target, and the wedding takes place. But then, of course, the legitimate Foppington appears and no end of complications ensue.

This is an exceedingly lavish and tasteful production; the performance throughout—and there are seemingly scores of them—are immaculate, and there is much to laugh at, Restoration or no. There are memorable lines, worthy of modern larceny, and there is the type of good slapstick which knows no age.

But I come back to the premise that in my opinion the play has a highly specialized appeal, and I doubt that there are enough specialized people to make it a popular success.

DAILY NEWS

November 23, 1950

Cyril Ritchard Pricelessly Funny In a Hilarious Romp, 'The Relapse'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Haste you to the revels which began last night at the Morosco Theatre. The Theatre Guild's offering of the Brattle Theatre's production of "The Relapse, or Virtue in Danger," is a gaudy, saucy romp by a fine company of merrymakers headed by Cyril Ritchard, who is giving a fantastically and exquisitely funny impersonation of a Seventeenth Century London fop.

This comedy, by Sir John Vanbrugh, was first performed in 1695, and records indicate it has never been given a professional production in New York. The Brattle Theatre of Cambridge, Mass., which specializes in the classics, found "The Relapse" while rummaging around and decided to give it a whirl—probably because Mr. Richard and his wife, Madge Elliott, were available and did "The Country Wife" with the Brattle company.

Many Good Performances.

According to modern theories of theatrical neatness, "The Relapse" is a structural mess in which a number of little plots are tossed together. But what a tossing they get! Swains, dandies, cheating husbands, virtuous wives, sly widows, wealthy ruffians, loutish servants, cunning marriage brokers and fawning tradesmen are thrown into a vastly spicy and rich-flavored salad. There are actors beyond counting on the stage of the Morosco—and what is more, these actors are acting. Nobody is taking a back seat just because Mr. Ritchard happens to be one of the funniest players alive, and splendidly absurd character parts are being broadly and happily played.

Being a Restoration comedy, "The Relapse" is bold and naughty, but its very extravagance is disarming. The staging, by Mr.

Ritchard, is a masterpiece of juggling. With a less spirited company, this complicated and popu-lous affair could become cumbersome and dull; but Mr. Ritchard has kept it bubbling and has resorted to several scenes of wild action, including a couple of seductions, which are pure Olsen and Johnson. The peak of the slambang clowning is in a scene in which Lord Foppington, the fop, is mistaken for an impostor and violently mistreated in the fearsome home of Sir Tunbelly Clumsey, a country gent of wealth but no breeding.

Grand Support for Ritchard.

Mr. Ritchard, the dandy, wears his fabulously rich raiment and wigs with the grandest of airs. His mincing walk is funnier than Carol Channing's in "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes." His voice has an incredible range of meaningful inflections, and his gift for hilarious pantomime is worthy of a Mack Sennett comedian.

And there are so many other enjoyable players, including many new to these parts. Among the familiars are John Emery as an errant husband and Ruth Matteson as his virtuous wife. Mrs. Ritchard (Miss Elliott) is charming as a scheming widow, and Murray Matheson is excellent as her former lover. Pilippa Bevans is a gem as a fat and dirty nurse.

Then, from the Brattle precincts, come such as Jan Farrand, joyously charging through the role of a girl named Hoyden; Thayer David, as a coarse and dreadful Sir Tunbelly, and Carl Don as a halfwitted manservant who somehow reminds me of Dave Chasen. These and many more.

The many scenes move swiftly in the settings by Robert O'Hearn, and Mr. O'Hearn's costumes are superb. "The Relapse" offers a night for laughter.

Daily Mirror

November 23, 1950

'The Relapse' Shows That Wickedness Can Be Dull

By ROBERT COLEMAN

The Brattle Theatre Company of Cambridge, Mass., is an admirable organization of young people, dedicated to the presentation of the classics. One of the latest additions to its large repertory is Sir John Vanbrugh's Restoration comedy, "The Relapse" or "Virtue in Danger," starring and directed by Cyril Ritchard.

The Theatre Guild's Theresa Helburn and Lawrence Langner saw the revival, liked it, took it on a brief tour of key cities and finally brought it to the Morosco Theatre last evening. At the rise of the curtain, Ritchard, immaculate in white tie and tails, made a gracious, explanatory comment upon the 244-year-old Vanburgh comic valentine.

It seems that Sir John, returning from the wars in France, spent his first evening back in London at a play by Colley Cibber. It dealt with a young married couple, who retired in felicity and virtue to the country. Their easy escape to rusticity annoyed Vanbrugh, so he decided, in a sequel, to bring them back to the British capital for further temptation.

In "The Relapse," the faithful Amanda Loveless, caught in the Restoration's bawdy and brittle social whirl, manages to remain true to her husband, though he falls victim to the wiles of her cousin, Berinthia. But the central figure of the rowdy romp, however, is Lord Foppington, an effete dandy who considers himself a devil with the ladies. The selfish Foppington, of course, gets his come-uppance from a young brother, who walks off with the heiress he intended to marry.

"The Relapse," a carnival of infidelity and cynicism, a maze of plots and counter-plots, cries for a highly stylized, graceful, tongue-in-cheek performance. This, it seldom gets, when the amazing Ritchard, as Lord Foppington, is off stage. And that is too often to suit us. About the only other member of the cast who can match his bouncy, mannered style is Madge Elliott (Mrs. Ritchard), though Robert Fletcher appears to good advantage with an appealingly natural and restrained portrayal of Foppington's vengeful nemesis.

Much of the second and third acts is crowded with lusty horseplay. Jan Farrand, Thayer David, Philippa Bevans and assorted associates are no mean hands with the slapstick. We expected the custard pies to start flying through the air any minute. Come to think of it, the evening might have been funnier and more enjoyable had they started plopping.

John Emery and Ruth Matteson have little to do as the Lovelesses, but Miss Matteson always manages to be an eye tonic. Jerry Kilty contributes an offensively swishy portrait of Coupler, the matchmaker.

A friendly audience of first-nighters roared and applauded robustly. As for us, we kept wishing that Oliver Cromwell had lived longer and thus prevented "The Relapse." Wickedness can be very dull.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

November 24, 1950

1696 Comedy's Funnier Today

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Type—Restoration comedy.

Topic—The artistic science of woo.

Nature—Frank, elegant hubbub.

Reception—Genuinely hysterical.

I think it—Calls for jubilation.

A 254-year-old comedy is likely to remain the funniest thing on Broadway for seasons to come. At risk of sounding silly I must admit to still laughing aloud after walking 12 blocks from the Morosco, where "The Relapse" opened Wednesday.

The play is amusing as much by virtue of how the players say it as by what they say.

The style and humor of the production is set quite brilliantly by Cyril Ritchard, who gives the play a brief introduction, acts the central figure, and is responsible for the direction. The project is a scheme of the enterprising Brattle Repertory Company of Cambridge, and is now presented, proudly I should think, by the Theater Guild.

The comedy tells of a society in which making love artfully was as much the fashion as making money was a few years ago, or becoming famous seems to be today. Marriage was a matter of finances or social barter, and opened the door to multiple amours.

While the characters are frank, they are equally preposterous and superficial, so in sum the play seems highly moral, in case that worries anyone. So engaging is its attitude, though, that the only faithful wife in the story seems quite a bore until she succumbs to an urgent beau.

It is played with energy and abandon, but fine mannerisms. The action never halts for the scene changes, from candy box boudoirs to Hogarthian halls.

Ritchard's Lord Foppington is a wonderful creation. He wears a periwig, which features a blond pompadour of altitude only slightly superior to Ethel Merman's. He moves in a switching, jittery strut that shows off his feathers and curls and laces to ostentatious advantage.

Madge Elliott, who is Mrs. Ritchard, runs him a close second for lending the play flourish and succulent humor. As the wicked widow, she is in a constant minuet of curtseys and gestures. Her own carefully prolonged seduction is one of the play's smartest moments.

"Edwina Black"

Daily Mirror

November 22, 1950

'Edwina Black' Comes To B'way from London Run

By ROBERT COLEMAN

By arrangement with Peter Daubeny Productions, Donald Flamm installed "Edwina Black," an English hit, in the Booth Theatre last evening. After a lengthy run in London, the original presentation still is touring the provinces. Personally, we doubt that the new arrival will have such success over here.

This seems to us another instance of the difference between London and New York tastes. Our British cousins appear to be satisfied with less meat, along with their dramatic potatoes, than we are. That might be because it costs them less to produce or to see a show than it does us. So, maybe they'r getting their money's worth, after all.

"Edwina Black," a collaboration by William Dinner and William Morum, is a psychological melodrama about a wealthy wife who, at her death, leaves her fortune to her impoverished schoolteacher husband and her former companion, though she had known they were having an affair during her illness. When the local doctor expresses doubt to Scotland Yard about the circumstances of her demise, things begin to pop.

The companion not only accuses the husband of murdering his wife, but of attempting to kill her, as well. He, in turn, insists that she did the horrendous deed and is merely seeking to clear herself at his expense. Throughout the proceedings stalks a dour housekeeper, who had loved her former mistress deeply.

We shan't tell you any more, for to do so would spoil what suspense there is, should you decide that a visit to the Booth is in order. However, we found "Edwina Black" a little too thin a dish for our palate. The first act builds a mood and generates considerable tension, and the last act, though obviously contrived, is at times gripping. But it is in the second, and what Arthur Hopkins called the important, stanza that "Edwina Black" failed us.

The authors, we thought, didn't probe deeply enough and with sufficient resource into the souls of the lovers, for a play that presumes to be something better than a mere mechanical thriller. We were seldom moved, and we should have been, often. We kept wanting the dramatists to get below the surface of the murky, whirlpoolish waters.

Flamm has given "Edwina Black" an excellent production. Michael Shepley is quite wonderful as a lumbering, shrewd, polite, but determined detective. He makes the sleuth almost as fascinating as that of Leo Carroll, in "Angel Street," and he has much less to work with.

Robert Harris and Signe Hasso, as the harassed heirs, make their roles seem better than they really are. They achieve remarkable emotional impact with a modicum of gunpowder. Marjorie Rhodes is effective as the brooding housekeeper.

The London production was staged by Chloe Gibson. We have heard that our version was restaged by an un-programmed director. Contractual difficulties probably prevented his being mentioned. We hereby tender the anonymous one a salute. Leo Kerz has designed a perfect setting.

At its best, "Edwina Black" is exciting theatre. Unfortunately, that isn't often enough. There are too many shallow valleys between the dramatic peaks.

"EDWINA BLACK"

Play by William Dinner and William Morum; staged by David Alexander; scenery by Leo Kerz; costumes by Elfi Von Kantzow; presented by Donald Flamm at the Booth Theatre, November 21, 1950. The cast:

Ellen.....Marjorie Rhodes
Henry Martin..Michael Shepley
Gregory Black...Robert Harris
Elizabeth Graham..Signe Hasso

Synopsis: Act I. Scene 1. An autumn evening in 1895. Scene 2. Time: Morning—a week later. Act II. Time: The same evening. Act III. Time: The next morning. The scene throughout is set in the main room of Amberwood House, in a suburb near London.

DAILY NEWS

November 22, 1950

'Edwina Black' British Whodunit

By JOHN CHAPMAN

If you want to curl up with a good, suspenseful, English-style whodunit, Mr. Shubert's Booth Theatre is the place to do it. Nice, comfortable chairs, too. Although this detective story—"Edwina Black," which had its premiere last evening—concerns only four characters, it has practically everything in the way of tested ingredients.

A seemingly natural death has occurred, but some dirty-minded snoop has suggested an autopsy and it is discovered that the late Edwina Black was carried off by poison. Arsenic, of course—it always is. There is an inspector from Scotland Yard, cheery and deferential but a fiend for details, who discovers that a new can of weed killer has recently been opened. A member of the audience, a York State farmer named Sidney Phillips, said last evening that he wished weed killer would work as well on weeds as it does on British murder victims.

Other Standard Ingredients.

There are three possible suspects. One is Signe Hasso, the extraordinarily handsome lady's companion who was hired to attend Mrs. Black, who had been an invalid. Another is Robert Harris, who plays Mr. Black. Since he is in love with Miss Hasso and bloody well fed up with his old creep of a wife, it could easily be him or even he. Then there is Marjorie Rhodes, a perfect harridan of a housekeeper, who acts mean enough to kill anybody.

The problem is turned over to plump, jolly Michael Shepley, who has run down from the Yard to look into things. He potters around, talking about the weather, his rheumatism and nice cups of tea and occasionally asking a question. His questions are so clever that soon he has the lovers, Mr. Harris and Miss Hasso, suspecting each other of the crime and having a devil of a row.

Go See for Yourself.

Suspense and suspicion are nicely mixed according to the best of formulas, and at the end of the second act the Broadway contingent of first-nighters were asking one another, "Who did it?" and the Hollywood contingent (lots of Hwd. folks in town these days) were asking, "Who done it?" In the third act they found out—but even if you ply me with liquor to loosen my tongue I won't tell you what they found out.

The action occurs in a nice suburban-London house designed by Leo Kerz. The authors, William Dinner and William Morum, have set the time in the 1890s, which gives Miss Hasso opportunity to look fetching in some fine costumes of the period. (Elfi von Kantzow, designer.) Miss Hasso also is quite a compelling actress, and Miss Rhodes, Mr. Shepley and Mr. Harris are fine, too.

I'd say that "Edwina Black" is a very good piece of standard workmanship. But impatient New Yorkers do not seem to be willing to curl up in their seats any more; they prefer to sit on the seat edges with their edges, and they may find "Edwina Black" running a little to words. It occurs to me that, on the stage, the solution of a death that has already occurred is not as compellingly dramatic as the prevention of a crime somebody is trying to commit, or the commission of a crime. Hence the greater success of "Angel Street," "Night Must Fall," "Ladies in Retirement" and the like.

New York Post
HOME NEWS
November 22, 1950

The Vengeance of Edwina Black

By Richard Watts Jr.

Although it is no masterpiece of its school, "Edwina Black," the English mystery melodrama which opened at the Booth last night, has two advantages that are not to be ignored. It is the best play of its kind currently available for addicts of the detective story and, in particular, it is so superior to the suspense drama that had its melancholy premiere the evening before that by comparison its frailties seem fairly infinitesimal. It certainly doesn't strike out into any new ground but, in its safely conventional manner, it is moderate fun.

I could not help being grateful to William Dinner and William Morum, its authors, because they have brought back one of my favorite stock characters of British crime fiction, the good-natured, fatherly, elderly detective of the type of the benevolent Sergeant Rough of "Angel Street." You can't mistake the dear old fellow. He is so placid and kindly, and he loves nothing better than puttering around his rose garden which is always in Hempstead, and he is sure to get rheumatism in his knee every time the wind blows from the West. He is one of the comforts of my life.

The Late Edwina

It is so pleasant to see him back in "Edwina Black," and it is so cheering to find him a rock of stability in a changing world, that I'm afraid I didn't always pay close attention to the proceedings when he was offstage. By comparison, the suspects seemed fairly uninteresting to me. But I must tell you that, when the play opens, the title character is already dead, and the elderly detective arrives to say that there is suspicion of murder. Arsenic, you know. And it seems that her husband and her companion were secretly in love.

Since there are only four people in the play, and one of them is the detective, it shouldn't be hard to spot the person responsible for the poisoning, and "Edwina Black" is not the type of mystery story in which the man-hunter is going to turn out to be the killer. I am not sure that the eventual solution is entirely according to the most ethical conception of the rules of the mystery readers' union, but I thought the secret was pretty shrewdly kept. It was well into the third act before I spotted the answer, and I am an addict of such tales.

Suspected Lovers

Chiefly, the plot is less concerned with the solution than with the effect of the suspicion of murder on the two lovers. I don't think it is giving away any legitimate secret to say that Edwina Black has a wry sort of vengeance in the way in which the pair grow to hate each other. It is rather entertainingly worked out, but I kept hoping that my friend, the detective, would come back on the stage and I found myself a little resentful when he stayed away. Certainly the best scenes are the ones wherein he holds forth.

A pleasant English actor named Michael Shepley plays the amiable Scotland Yard man just as he should be played, and the suspects are well enough enacted by Signe Hasso, Robert Harris and Marjorie Rhodes. The setting, as well as the period and the detective, is closely reminiscent of "Angel Street," and I can only repeat that there is nothing startling in its originality about "Edwina Black." It is the plodding, conventional type of English thriller, but it does supply evidence for my stubborn belief that even a fair mystery drama can be better than no mystery drama at all.

Journal-American
November 22, 1950

Well-Knit Mystery With a Superb Cop

By JOHN McCLAIN

As an old Conan Doyle addict I was entranced by the action which was offered last night in a mystery melodrama called "Edwina Black" at the Booth Theatre.

The setting was proper (London suburb), the time was familiar (late Victorian), and it even seemed that the infallible sleuth was somehow cut to the pattern of an enlightened Dr. Watson. I had a good time.

The fact that Sherlock Holmes, himself, was never introduced, and that Mr. Doyle was not the author, is all to the good, since they might have arrived at a much too rapid solution and sent us all out into the cold night at the end of the first act.

In any case, the nefarious proceedings at Amberwood House, Eng., went roughly as follows:

Edwina Black, an invalid, is dead and it is immediately apparent that her husband (Robert Harris) and her companion (Signe Hasso) have a more than casual interest in one another. Even so, everything is serene and the funeral is proceeding on schedule until the arrival of a police officer (Michael Shepley) who reports that the doddering doctor who signed the death certificate is not happy with his testament and would like an investigation.

This is conducted at once, and it is discovered that Mrs. Black met her fate not by natural causes, as presumed, but by a lethal dose of arsenic.

• • •

Mutual Suspicion

Aside from a maid (Marjorie Rhodes), who had been almost hysterically attached to the late lamented, the husband and his lover are the only characters who could possibly have put the chill on the unfortunate Mrs. B.—so the rest of the festivities center largely around their mutual suspicion of one another, a situation heightened by the fact that the copper learns they both share jointly in her ample will.

From two people who are sincerely in love, they degenerate through their vice-versa disbelief into mortal combatants. There is a lot to do about who ordered the arsenic for the greenhouse and who bought the hand lotion (which also happens to be arsenic), what time who was where, and why.

Through all this the copper moves majestically extracting a clue here, a contradiction there. There is the Italian villa, a picture of which happens to adorn the wall of the set, where the illicit couple had planned to spend their reclining years. If that isn't premeditation, what is? And why did one of you order railroad tickets more than a month before the lady passed away?

If you think I'm going to tell you, you're crazy. I think it's worth the price at the Booth to go and find out for yourself.

• • •

Shepley Hailed

This is my idea of a skillfully constructed play. The authors, William Dinner and William Morum, lay a slow and unpromising first act mostly exposition. They give you plenty of action in the second and bring the curtain down at a time when you are wondering how they will ever get even. In the third they do, and with enough ingenuity to make it stick.

Signe Hasso gets off to a mild start but builds to a strong and convincing finish. Robert Harris, as the husband, plays a straight pedagogical part, properly off-beam to carry suspicion and Marjorie Rhodes is competently irascible.

But I thought Michael Shepley was superb as the cop. It is wonderful to know that in these parlous times we have a guy around who will personally handle such problems with as much cunning and politesse.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

November 22, 1950

= *By* HOWARD BARNES =

Arsenic and Dull Talk

A gaslit melodrama, "Edwina Black," has come from London to flicker feebly at the Booth. Arsenic and dull talk are the chief ingredients of this suposed thriller by William Dinner and William Morum. A company of four, starring Signe Hasso and Robert Harris, labors to sustain some measure of suspense and suspicion. The curious thing is that it succeeds in keeping the proceedings moderately mystifying without causing the slightest anxiety about the various fates of the participants.

* * *

The authors have set their pedestrian fable in a London suburb in 1895. There the lady of the title is an off-stage corpse, dead by poisoning. Since Mr. Black is an indigent and faithless schoolteacher, enamoured of a combination companion and secretary, an accusing finger is pointed pretty directly at both of them throughout most of three limp acts. A testy housekeeper, Ellen, who has been smuggling large quantities of port to her invalid mistress, is also incriminated in a dark deed, despite her fierce loyalty to the arsenic-loaded Edwina. The death by unnatural causes is reasonably confusing, but it is very dreary.

* * *

The few snarls of the plot, which involve a projected trip to Lake Como by the lovers, a can of weed-killer, a large fortune to be shared by the widower and his mistress and a lethal powder to whiten dishpan hands, are unraveled somewhat accidentally by a Scotland Yard inspector, who looks and acts for all the world like a Dr. Watson deserted by Sherlock Holmes. His investigation is as humdrum as most of the doings in "Edwina Black." It is small wonder that no one has cared to take responsibility for the staging of the local production.

* * *

Miss Hasso has a few moments of vital characterization as the secretary whose illicit romance is destroyed by a ghost, but she is reduced to correcting themes about the French Revolution when the action almost comes to a full stop. Harris is comparatively harassed as the pedagogue and Michael Shepley stomps stolidly around as the detective, uncovering more clews than he can add up properly until the very end of the last scene. Marjorie Rhodes, as Ellen, is by far the best of the players, lending a faint air of credulity to a shoddily contrived and hapless melodrama. The finish of "Edwina Black" may be in the nature of a surprise, but it is scarcely worth the interminable waiting that it entails.

The New York Times

November 22, 1950

Signe Hasso Appears in 'Edwina Black,' Which Examines a Slight Case of English Poisoning

By BROOKS ATKINSON

"Edwina Black" is a thoroughly competent murder play. Given the problem of solving the mystery of a fatal poisoning, William Dinner and William Morum have not made any mistakes or broken any of the rules. Being English writers, they naturally have a high regard for the amenities. They have the satisfaction of knowing that the version which opened at the Booth last evening is civilized, well-bred and proper, and that it is acted very well, indeed.

* * *

To a playgoer who is patiently waiting for the mystery to be cleared away, the problem of the actors is the more engrossing. What goes on in their minds while the authors are planting clues, confusing theatregoers and going through the old business? For the actors look so much brighter than the authors. In the person of Signe Hasso, "Edwina Black" has one remarkably interesting performer. She is a beautiful woman with a trim figure, which one may notice but should never mention in print, and the fire and temperament of a superior actress.

* * *

According to the whims of the authors, she is a lady's companion who is in love with the husband of the deceased and who is inevitably suspected of administering the poison. She is tender; she is suspicious; she is frightened; she is alternately on the defensive or the attack, and she is very noble at the end. Since Miss Hasso is a born actress, this is a very soothing spectacle to watch from a comfortable chair in the orchestra where everything is quiet and respectable. But does Miss Hasso ever wonder what she is doing in such a routine play?

The cast is also good in the other parts. Scotland Yard would thank its stars if it ever had such a good Scotland Yard detective as Michael Shepley. He bulges a bit like an honest family man. He is affable, respectful, calm, appreciative, polite and ever so sympathetic, and he never cracks a smile. It would be an honor to be incarcerated by such a well-bred man. Robert Harris, who plays the part of the happy widower, is a scholarly gentleman with the sensitive face of one who has dwelled among the classics and borne the world's ingratitude patiently. As the household servant, Marjorie Rhodes is a plain woman with pride in her rectitude—a veritable though rather terrifying force in the home.

* * *

Sit all these people around a table and give them some pencils and paper, and the chances are that they could put together a more interesting drama than "Edwina Black." Since they all probably have friends who are looking for jobs, they might be tempted to write in more parts than the authors of "Edwina Black" have. That would be a genuine contribution. Four parts are not enough to keep an audience interested in such a decorous family poisoning. "Edwina Black" is eminently correct in craftsmanship and writing. It is a well-compounded sedative.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

November 22, 1950

Murder By Arsenic Staged at Booth

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Type—Murder mystery.
Treatment—Obvious.
Credit—Sound third act.
Cast—Valiant.
I find it—Pretty hackneyed.

The scarceness of successful mystery plays suggests that radio, television and lending libraries just about have saturated the public taste for puzzling thrillers. "Edwina Black" suggests first-hand reasons for the risk in staging mysteries.

The lady of the title was an unpleasant invalid whose funeral is interrupted in the first scene, so that the presence of arsenic in her body can shortly thereafter be revealed.

Her widower and her companion have fallen in love. Her servant is right out of "Rebecca," with protestations of devotion for the dead mistress, and a macabre insistence on preserving the influence of the dead woman.

Effects of Killing.

The play proceeds to show the effect of the death, revealed as deliberate killing, on these three people, as a Scotland Yard inspector moves in and deliberately causes friction between them.

The major difficulties here are inate ones of the standard mystery play. This kind of story is concerned with probing an action already completed. It exists in the past, and devotes itself to talk instead of action.

The play suffers from a crying need for invention. It employs every stock symptom of arsenic, hackneyed to any detective novel fan.

The characters are superficial. Since there are only four of them, the plot is obvious. You may be sure that unless the lovers suspect each other, there will not be three acts.

Roundup Time.

The last act gathers tension as the inspector begins to ride herd on the suspects. He reasons logically and operates intelligently.

At the end there is a twist. But it is just one of four solutions, any one as good as any other. Having bet on the same answer the authors did, I felt prejudiced about the play's ending.

The actors do their wholehearted best with a trite and well nigh humorless script. Signe Hasso is lovely looking and most firm in her treatment of the unfortunate companion. Playing straight, she forces down some awkward lines and attitudes until the character becomes believable, if never scintillating.

"Pride's Crossing"

DAILY NEWS

November 21, 1950

Mildred Dunnock, Tamara Geva in Moody Thriller, 'Pride's Crossing'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Another drama of quiet, drawn-out suspense, quickened by good individual scenes played by Mildred Dunnock and Tamara Geva, is Victor Wolfson's "Pride's Crossing." It is inevitable that this play, which opened at the Biltmore Theatre last evening, should be compared with "The Innocents," for its mood and method are somewhat the same and it involves an evil fate which threatens a small boy.

Mr. Wolfson, however, is writing about the present, not the turn of the century, and he is not interested in the supernatural. The evil which hangs above the house at Pride's Crossing, Mass., is human greed. Several people live in this house. There is Miss Dunnock, an aging New England aristocrat. There is her companion, Miss Geva, daughter of a one-time stableman on the place, whose sultry beauty and changing moods reveal her as a peasant of foreign extraction in this aristocratic household.

Strange Conflicts.

There are two boys, Robin Michael and Donny Harris—the first Miss Dunnock's grandson, and the second, Miss Geva's son. There is Miss Dunnock's own son, John Baragrey, nominal head of the household. Recently become a widower, he is now concerned over the health of his boy, whose heart is in a precarious state. So Mr. Baragrey sends for Katherine Bard to take care of the lad.

Miss Bard, like the governess played by Beatrice Straight in "The Innocents," finds she has come in upon a deep and disturbing situation. There are strange conflicts and strange alliances. Miss Dunnock seems to be putty in the hands of the strange Miss Geva, and Miss Geva's resentment of Miss Bard seems queer. The newly hired governess comes slowly and with some horror to the conclusion that the boy in her charge is being slowly and cleverly murdered.

Contrasting Performances.

Much of "Pride's Crossing" seems more like a suspense novel than it does a suspense drama. Sometimes it substitutes detail for movement of story—which is all right in a novel but sometimes a handicap in a play. Nevertheless, the affair at the Biltmore kept my attention and offered some excitement. Miss Dunnock, an able actress, gives a splendidly-wrought characterization of a woman whose blue blood has begun to run thin, and Miss Geva, with her warmth and vitality, is an excellent foil. The others in the company, boys and grownups alike, handle their work well.

Martin Manulis directed, and I think he deliberately emphasized mood rather than pace. There is an attractive set by Ralph Alswang.

"PRIDE'S CROSSING"

Play by Victor Wolfson; staged by Martin Manulis; settings by Ralph Alswang; costumes by Mildred Sutherland; presented by T. Edward Hambleton at the Biltmore Theatre, November 20, 1950. The cast:

Bobby.....Robin Michael
Allan.....Donny Harris
Mrs. Bayard Goodale.....Mildred Dunnock
Zilla.....Tamara Geva
Lathrop Goodale..John Baragrey
Selena Merrill..Katharine Bard

Synopsis: The entire action of the play takes place in the small drawing room of the Goodale home at Pride's Crossing, Mass. Act I. Scene 1. Evening. Scene 2. An hour later. Late afternoon. Scene 4. A week later. Morning. Act II. Scene 1. The same day. Late afternoon. Scene 2. The following afternoon. Before dinner. Scene 3. Several hours later.

New York Post

HOME NEWS

November 21, 1950

Sinister Doings in New England

By Richard Watts Jr.

The theatre season's busiest week hardly got off to an impressive start at the Biltmore last night, where an overwrought suspense drama by Victor Wolfson called "Pride's Crossing" was offered for public inspection. Although it has the advantage of a performance by Mildred Dunnock, one of the finest of American actresses, in one of its leading roles, the new play can hardly be recommended even to those who are inclined to agree with me in my frequent suspicion that a fairly bad mystery melodrama would be better than no mystery melodrama at all.

I should perhaps hasten to add that "Pride's Crossing" is a mystery melodrama only in the sense that it is a little difficult to figure out for the first of the two acts just what the suspense is. There is a somewhat enigmatic New England family, consisting of an eerie grandmother, a neurotic son and a sickly grandson, and there is a sinister Polish woman, who has a disagreeable child and a secret hold over the family, and then a governess arrives, who finds, as the audience already knows, that something odd and evil is going on.

Comparisons

In a way, the new work is a little like last season's excellent dramatization of Henry James, "The Innocents," but without the ghosts and without its skill. At times there is also the suggestion of a Eugene O'Neill play gone wrong. Indeed, so far as the idea goes, there is small reason why "Pride's Crossing" shouldn't have been an effective melodrama, save that, instead of being taut and effective, it has a hapless way of growing rather silly in its big scenes. Without Miss Dunnock's presence, things might really have got out of hand.

Some years ago Mr. Wolfson wrote a charming and imaginative fantasy called "Excursion," which had a highly justifiable critical success and attracted a certain amount of popular attention. Perhaps the author thought that this time he would change such an unfortunate state of affairs around and write for the public, rather than for the reviewers, but it is my fear that he won't appeal to either. With a serviceable plot conception in mind, he has provided a kind of gimcrack thriller that seems old-fashioned without offering good old-fashioned thrills.

Child Actors

At least, the production of "Pride's Crossing" assures me on one point about which I have been worrying a bit. There have, of recent seasons, been so many fine performances by child actors that I had begun to fear that I was becoming a little soft about infant performers. But there are two boy actors in Mr. Wolfson's melodrama, and, after watching them, I know that I can still be stern and chill concerning the histrionics of the younger set. In general, the presentation lacks the smoothness and guile necessary to make its suspense impressive.

This is certainly not the fault of Miss Dunnock. Her portrayal of the frail and timid grandmother, who finally has her strange vengeance, is good enough to carry the play over some dangerous moments, which is a sizable achievement. Tamara Geva, as the menacing Pole, has some effective scenes, but gets a little out of hand in a few of her climaxes. Katharine Bard plays the governess with straightforward effectiveness, and John Baragrey does as well as possible as the hero who seems pretty suspicious for a while. "Pride's Crossing" is considerably less than the thriller we have all been hoping for.

The New York Times

November 21, 1950

'Pride's Crossing' Brings a Dark Fable of Massachusetts to the Biltmore Theatre

By BROOKS ATKINSON

By putting one word carefully after another Victor Wolfson has succeeded in writing the most monotonous play of the season. "Pride's Crossing," he calls it. Some good actors made a serious attempt to act it at the Biltmore Theatre last evening.

If "Pride's Crossing" were less monotonous it might be a work of art. For it is easy to imagine that Mr. Wolfson hoped he was writing something half way between "Ethan Frome" and "The Innocents." Old Mrs. Bayard Goodale of fashionable Pride's Crossing, Mass., and her Polish servant, Zilla, are living in the Goodale mansion in a state of ominous devotion.

* * *

Looking under the genteel devotion, Mr. Wolfson has managed to find some pretty terrible things. Don't say where you read it, but Zilla was old man Goodale's mistress before he died in a spirit of outward piety, leaving the mansion to Zilla and his widow. To protect her investment Zilla appears to have conspired in the death of young Goodale's wife, and is now engaged in the highly irregular peccadillo of destroying the Goodale grandchild. Zilla just doesn't like to have many people around.

If this story were written by an artist it might have overtones of horror and passion that would transcend the materials. But Mr. Wolfson has written it mechanically. The dialogue is literal and the arrangement of the story is routine.

In the direction, Martin Manulis has no doubt striven for an effect of portentous stylization. The performance is deliberately paced and the tone is gray and shadowy. Ralph Alswang has designed an interesting old-fashioned interior with knicknacks out of the polite New England past.

* * *

Some very reputable actors go faithfully through the plot that Mr. Wolfson has sketched on his drawing-board. Mildred Dunnock, who gave an inspired performance as the wife in "Death of a Salesman," plays the Yankee matriarch. Tamara Geva plays Zilla; John Baragrey plays the grumpy son, and Katharine Bard, who mercifully looks attractive and normal, plays the governess. Young Robin Michael gives a very perceptive performance as the bewildered and disconsolate grandson.

From a technical point of view, these performances are no doubt competent and ought to be scientifically evaluated on the critical abacus. But "Pride's Crossing" defies criticism by spreading a pall of painful dullness throughout the theatre. There is nothing wrong with it except that it is terribly boring. All that it needs is some genius.

New York Herald Tribune

November 21, 1950

By HOWARD BARNES

Nothing Under the Elms

THE skeletons in a New England family's closet cause a considerable rattling on the stage of the Biltmore, where "Pride's Crossing" has opened. After several scenes of dark hints and double-talk, Victor Wolfson brings them all out in the open in a tortuous and untidy climax. Such expert players as Mildred Dunnock and Tamara Geva do their level best to make them fearsome and consequential, but they remain, for the most part, clanking bones. What should have become a mounting emotional tension in the play sags embarrassingly before the final curtain.

* * *

The author contemplates a curious clan living in the Massachusetts town of the title with vaguely melodramatic flourishes. A widow has her dead husband's mistress for a companion, while her understandably resentful son wanders in and out of the proceedings and his illegitimate half-brother and a grandson play cowboy games together. The intrusion of a governess from Philadelphia permits the unmasking of assorted evils, considerable discourse on the Yankee conscience and the brutish nature of the immigrant, and a great deal of tedious chatter and stage business. Incidentally, the elders always dress for dinner.

* * *

Wolfson achieves occasional spurts of eloquence, particularly in the scene in which the proud matriarch muses over her tangled past with a comparative stranger, but neither the lines nor the situations evoke any genuine feeling. Even the set of interlocking triangles which keeps the action moving loses the slight fascination that is promised in the early stanzas of "Pride's Crossing." Characters move about a handsome Ralph Alswang setting and threaten each other menacingly at times, but they never take on convincing substance. Even when Lathrop Goodale starts to throttle the peasant woman who is trying to steal his mother's home, the effect is more ridiculous than terrifying.

* * *

Miss Dunnock alone succeeds in bringing a bit of compulsion and persuasion to the didoes. She is regal and somewhat pitiful as the aging Mrs. Goodale who demonstrates that good breeding counts in the clutches. Miss Geva is tempestuous as the ex-mistress, but the motivation for her wicked flouncing is either obvious or dull. Katharine Bard plays the governess ably enough and John Baragrey struggles with the part of the lawful Goodale son and heir. And there are a couple of tots named Robin Michael and Donny Harris to give a nursery touch to Grand Guignol contriving. "Pride's Crossing" tries hard to be sternly tragic, but it is stumbling and tiresome.

Daily Mirror

November 21, 1950

'Pride's Crossing' Fails To Create Suspense

By ROBERT COLEMAN

It is difficult to believe that the same Victor Wolfson, who gave us the charming and deft "Excursion," could have penned so dull and taxing a piece as "Pride's Crossing," which T. Edward Hambleton brought to the Biltmore Theatre last evening. The new arrival has the effect of a sedative throughout much of its two acts.

"Pride's Crossing" is somewhat reminiscent of "The Innocents," but lacks that play's power to create a tense and arresting mood. It, too, deals with a home, if you can call it that, under an evil spell. It probably began as an eerie character study, and ended up as a none-too-adroit melodrama.

"Pride's Crossing" is a delightful town on the North Shore of Massachusetts, site of extensive and handsome estates. In one of them live the unhappy Goodales, an old family with a scandal in the closet. The elderly Mrs. Goodale had been forced to share her husband and her house with the wild gypsy-like daughter of the family's stable-master.

This sinister and possessive girl had borne the deceased Bayard Goodale a son. She proceeded to try to eliminate all who stood in the way of his inheriting the Goodale fortune. She was eventually thwarted in her ruthless campaign of destruction by a determined young schoolteacher.

Under the uneven direction of Martin Manulis, Mildred Dunnock, who was superlative in "Death of a Salesman," Katharine Bard, Tamara Geva and John Baragrey do their able best for a lost cause. As the tempestuous villainess, Miss Geva was notably victimized by her part. Robin Michael and Donny Harris do as well as could be expected, under the circumstances, in juvenile roles.

One of the nicest things about "Pride's Crossing" is Ralph Alswang's re-creation of a manorial drawing-room. We only wish that Wolfson had filled it with a more gripping and rewarding play. It really is astounding that so many usually dependable talents could have missed their targets so dismally.